AUGUST 1960 35 C

THE saint®

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

EDITED BY
LESLIE CHARTERIS

ALL-NEW! Stories by **POUL ANDERSON**
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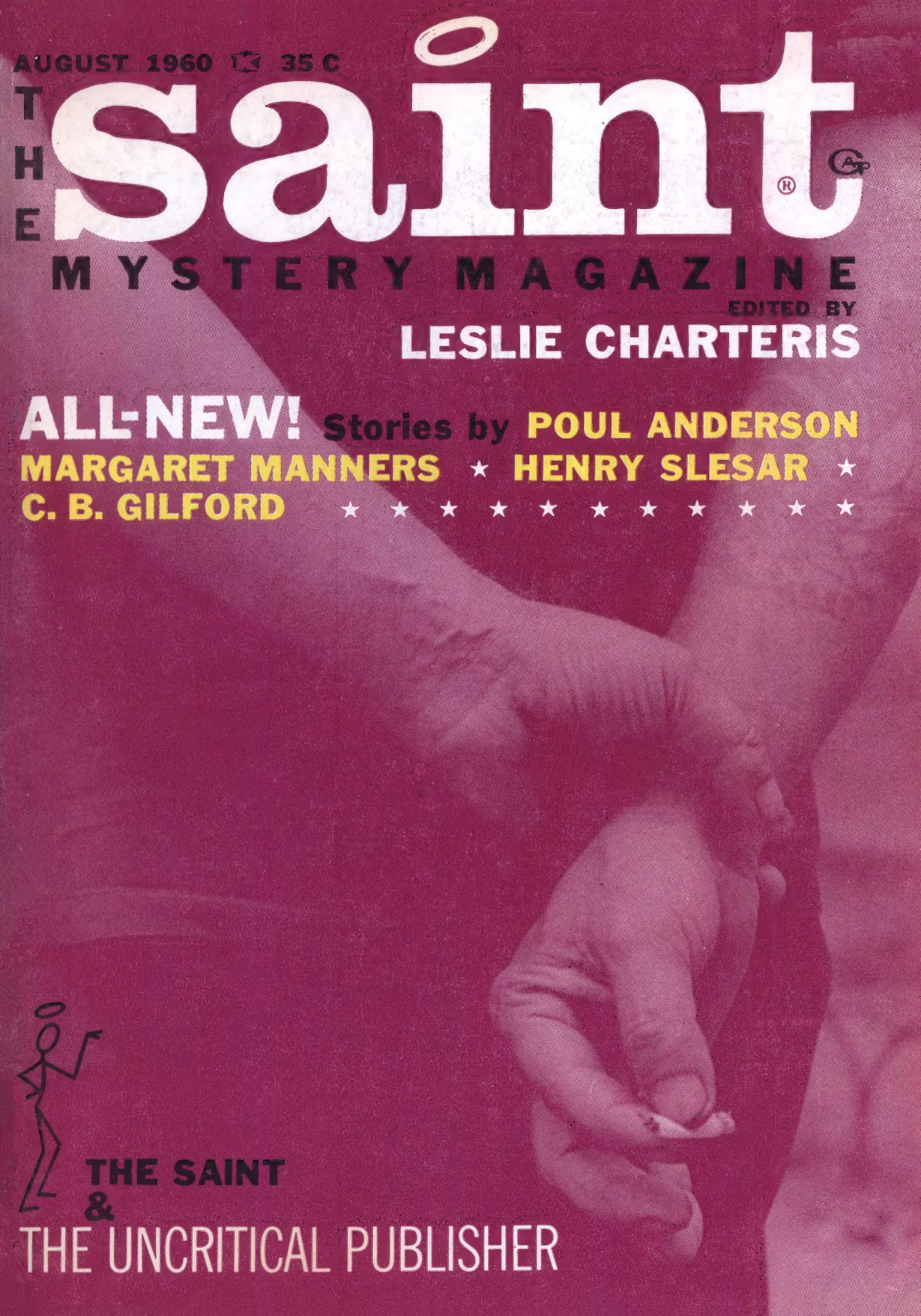

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Make Money Writing Short Paragraphs

Chicago Man Reveals a Short Cut to Authorship

Discloses little-known angle by which beginners often get paid five to ten times more per word than the rates paid to famous authors. Now anyone who can write a sentence in plain English can write for money without spending weary years "learning to write."

FOR years and years a relatively small number of people have had a "corner" on one of the most profitable authors' markets ever known. They've been going quietly along selling thousands and thousands of contributions. None of them have had to be trained authors. None of them have been "big name" writers. Yet, in hundreds of cases they have been paid from five to ten times as much per word as was earned by famous authors.

The successful men and women in this field had such a good thing that they kept it pretty well to themselves. Mr. Benson Barrett was one of these people. For years he enjoyed a steady income — made enough money in spare time to pay for a fine farm on the outskirts of Chicago.

Finally, Mr. Barrett decided to let others in on the secret. Since then he has shown a number of other men and women how to write for money. He has not had to give them any lessons in writing. He has not asked them to go through any long course of study or practice. In fact, most of his protégés have started mailing contributions to magazines within two weeks after starting with his plan.

Mr. Barrett says that the only skill required is that the aspiring author be able to write a sentence in plain English. Almost anyone with a common school education can write well enough to follow. Mr. Barrett's plan, because the contributions you will send to magazines are rarely more than one paragraph in length.

Shut-ins, housewives, folks who are retired on small incomes, even employed men and women who like to use idle hours in a constructive way — all types are making money on short paragraphs.

Mr. Barrett does not teach you to write. He shows you *what* to write, what *form* to put it in, and *who to send it to*. He shows you a simple method for *getting ideas* by the hundreds. He gives you a list of more than *200 magazines* that are looking for this kind of material and will buy from beginners. In other words, he teaches you a method, an angle, a plan for starting to write right away for money.

IF you would like to see your writing in print and get paid for it — just send your name on a postcard to Mr. Barrett. He will send full information about his plan of coaching by return mail — postage prepaid. He makes no charge for this information. And, no salesman will call on you. You decide, at home, whether you'd like to try his plan. If the idea of writing twenty or thirty short paragraphs a week and getting back a lot of small checks appeals to you, ask Mr. Barrett for this information.

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Yes! Remembering is a trick! Powerful memories can be made to order—you don't have to be born with them! The secret of a super-powered, hair-trigger memory is as simple as tying your shoelace! I can teach it to you in a single evening! *And I'm willing to prove it to you without your risking a penny!* Here's how!

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Take this book and turn to page 39. Read eight short pages—no more! And then, put down the book. Review in your own mind the one simple secret I've shown you. *And then—get ready to test your new, AUTOMATIC memory!*

What you are going to do, in that very first evening, is this! without referring to the book, you are going to sit down, and you are going to write—not five, not ten, but TWENTY important facts that you have never been able to memorize before! If you are a business man, they may be customers' orders that you have received . . . if you are a salesman, they may be twenty different products in your line . . . if you are a student, they may be the twenty parts of your homework . . . if you are a housewife, they may be important appointments that you have to keep tomorrow!

In any case, you are simply going to glance over that list again for a few moments. *You are going to perform a simple mental trick on each one of these facts—that will burn that fact into your mind, permanently and automatically!* And then you are going to put that list away. You're going to bed without thinking of it again.

And the next morning, you are going to amaze your family and friends! When you go down to business, you'll attend to every one of those orders—*automatically*—without referring to your memo pad! For perhaps the first time in your life, you'll be able to *plan ahead your entire day*—automatically, in your own mind—without being a slave to reminders, or notes, or other 'paper crutches!"

Yes! And you'll amaze your friends by remembering every product in your line—backwards and forwards—in the exact order that you memorized them! You'll keep every single appointment on time—*because one appointment will automatically flash into your mind after another—at the precise moment you need them—exactly as though you pushed a mental button!*

All this—in a single evening! Here is a gift that will pay you dividends for as long as you live! *A simple trick . . . a simple secret of burning facts into your memory that may change your entire life!*

Suddenly, Whole New Worlds of Self-Confidence Open Up for You!

But this is just the beginning of the "miracles" you can perform with your memory! This secret is just one of the over 50 MEMORY INTENSIFIERS contained in this book! You have seen men and women use these exact same methods on television to astound you! *But you never knew how incredibly simple they were—once you learned the inside secret!*

For instance—REMEMBERING NAMES AND FACES! How many times have you been embarrassed, because you couldn't remember the name of the person you were talking to . . . or introduce him to a friend! *In as little as one short week after you receive this book,* how would you like to walk into a room full of TWENTY new people . . . meet each one of them only once . . . *and then remember the names—automatically—for as long as you live!*

Yes! These names and faces are filed in the storehouse of your memory—permanently! Whenever you meet these people on the street . . . whenever you bump into them at the club . . . whenever they drop in unexpectedly at a friend's house—*the instant you see their face, their name pops into your mind automatically!* There is no hesitation, no embarrassment! *By the time you can reach out to shake their hands, your memory has delivered all the important facts you need to please them!*

Think of the advantage in business—when you can call every customer by his first name—and then ask for his wife and children, instantly, by *their* names! Think of the impression you'll make when you ask him about the state of his business, about his hobbies, when you even repeat—almost word for word—the last conversation you had with him! Think of becoming a celebrity at your club—as the member who "knows everyone" . . . who can be depended upon to avoid mistakes, to win new friends for the organization, to get things done!

But this is still just the beginning! This book teaches you to *remember exactly what you hear and read!* It gives you the confidence you need to make an important point at a business conference . . . to back up your opinion in discussions . . . become a *leader* in conversation, with dozens of interesting facts at your fingertips!

This book teaches you how to memorize a speech, or a sales presentation—in minutes! It teaches you how to remember every card played when you relax at night! It can improve your gin, or poker, or bridge game by

MEET HARRY LORAYNE "The human being with the most phenomenal memory in the world!" Harry Lorayne has lectured in front of thousands of Americans! Rotarians, Elks, Masons, Chamber of Commerce groups have all called on this amazing man to prove the business and social power of a strong, reliable memory! Lorayne's memory is so strong that he can remember the names, faces, addresses and occupations of over 700 different people in a single evening—after meeting each one of them only once!

And yet, a few short years ago, this man's memory was no better than yours! This man trained his own memory—he built the most fabulous memory in the world from scratch! And now he gives you the very same secrets he discovered and perfected himself! Memory Builders that work overnight! Secrets that can change your entire life in a single week—OR EVERY CENT OF YOUR MONEY BACK!

Read the thrilling details on this page! Try them—ENTIRELY AT OUR RISK!

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This book shows you how to improve the depth and force and power of your mind! It shows you how to double your vocabulary . . . learn dozens of ways to burn new words into your memory . . . learn their meanings without looking them up . . . repeat entire phrases, sentences, paragraphs from the great writers! You'll be able to learn a foreign language almost overnight – at least three to four times as quickly and easily as you could without this system! You'll be able to hear a joke, story or anecdote only once, and then repeat it in the same hilarious way!

Yes! And most important of all, this book will show you how to *professionally organize your mind* – do what you have to do in *half* the time! You'll remember dates, addresses, appointments—automatically! You'll carry dozens of telephone numbers in the file-cabinet of your mind! You'll stop going back over work two or three times because you'd forgotten something! *Let me send you this book – and prove these facts in one short evening – OR IT DOESN'T COST YOU A PENNY!*

Try It Entirely at My Risk!

The name of this book is HOW TO DEVELOP A SUPER-POWER MEMORY! I believe that this book is revolutionary – because it proves, once and for all, that memory improvement *can* be fun . . . it *can* be exciting . . . it *can* be passed from one person to another—automatically!

This book is a word-for-word copy of my regular mail-order course, which I sell for $25. However, the book costs you only $2.98! *And I want you to try this book – in your own home – entirely at my risk!* Here's how!

First, try for yourself the experiment I have described in this article! *See for yourself the almost-unbelievable results in the very first evening alone!* And then, continue to use the book for an additional week! In this very first week alone, if this amazing book doesn't do everything I say . . . if it doesn't give you a file-cabinet memory – no matter what your age – no matter how poor you may think your memory is today – *then simply return the book for every cent of your money back!*

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Ruth Ruzzie, WNNT, Virginia . . . this book is fascinating reading . . . Harry Lorayne states this emphatically . . . THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A POOR MEMORY . . . ONLY A TRAINED OR UNTRAINED MEMORY. He shows in this fascinating book how to easily train your own memory to retain facts . . . figures . . . places . . . people and whatever you wish to remember . . . how to quickly memorize speeches or facts that you wish to remember for future use . . . I found HOW TO DEVELOP A SUPER-POWER MEMORY an experience in reading.

Ed Galing, Pennsylvania Intelligencer, ... **Have you ever wished you had a better memory? That you could remember names, places, things? Well, Sir, a new book just out is guaranteed to improve your memory and you will be able to amaze your friends with your feats of memory . . . "HOW TO DEVELOP A SUPER-POWER MEMORY," by Harry Lorayne. The author can call more than 700 persons by their first name after meeting them for the first time . . . The book contains the secret on how to be a good rememberer . . . If you're having trouble remembering a phone number or an anniversary give this book a try. It could make you happy, successful, rich.**

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28. TRUE LOVE GUIDE—Covers how to woo, win and hold love. Dates, conversation, detecting love, behavior, gifts, secret meetings, compliments, storm clouds, passion, engagement, etc.

30. HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS AND BE POPULAR—Gives you dozens of easy ways to make new friends and keep them, how to overcome shyness, inferiority feelings, nervousness; tells you how to get dates with the opposite sex, how to act with one or a group, how to develop your personality, how to be liked, popular and happy.

31. THE ART OF KISSING—Covers different kinds of kisses; the technique, the thrills, the varieties: Vacuum, Eyelash, Nip, French, Surprise, Electric, etc.; kissing games.

32. SEX FACTS FOR WOMEN—Advice on the functions of the various parts of the woman's body, an understanding of the sex act and the biology of reproduction.

33. SEX FACTS FOR MEN—Offers an understanding of the anatomy and physiology of the male generative organs; explains the routine of the act of love, and guides him in living a sane sex life.

34. COMMON SENSE IN ETIQUETTE—A complete guidebook to good manners, covering every possible situation: introductions, conversation, table manners, at-home, visiting, traveling, correspondence, entertaining, weddings, funerals, parties, what to wear, do, etc.

40. CLASSICAL LOVE TALES—A collection of eleven of the most famous love stories of all times. Once read, always remembered.

41. ONE OF CLEOPATRA'S NIGHTS—Cleopatra herself danced and she told of heart consuming love—sensual pleasure—burning passion—youth inexhaustible and ever fresh—the promise of bliss to come—all this and more she offered.

39. TALES OF FRENCH LOVE AND PASSION—A collection of daring short stories, translated from the original French. Among them: The Wedding Night, Love's Awakening, The Artist's Wife, Forbidden Fruit, Marroca, etc.

42. FACTS ABOUT NUDISM—Tells the strange facts about Nudists, who they are, where they have their camps, why they run around nude, erotic reactions in nudism, what they hope to accomplish, etc.

43. FAMOUS POEMS, RECITATIONS & BALLADS—These recitations have jerked tears from millions of eyes—and likewise have brought laughter to equal millions. All the old favorites—Casey at the Bat, If, Abou Ben Adhem, The Boston Burglar, Love Stuff—and many new ones as well.

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THE SAINT and the uncritical publisher

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Even the strongest men have their weak moments.

Peter Quentin once wrote a book. Many young men do, but usually with more disastrous results. Moreover he did it without saying a word to anyone, which is perhaps even more uncommon; and even the Saint did not hear about it until after the crime had been committed.

"Next time you're thinking of being rude to me," said Peter Quentin, on that night of revelation, "please remember that you're talking to a budding novelist whose work has been compared to Dumas, Tolstoy, Conan Doyle, and others."

Simon Templar choked over his highball.

"Only pansies bud," he said severely. "Novelists fester. Of course, it's possible to be both."

"I mean it," insisted Peter seriously. "I was keeping it quiet until I heard the verdict, and I had a letter from the publishers today."

There was no mistaking his earnestness; and the Saint regarded him with affectionate gloom. His vision of the future filled him with overwhelming pessimism. He had seen the fate of other young men—healthy, upright, young men who had had a book published.

He had seen them tread the

From: THE SAINT INTERVENES Copyright © 1934 by Leslie Charteris

downhill path of pink shirts, velvet coats, long hair, quill pens, cocktail parties, and beards, until finally they sank into the awful limbos of Bloomsbury and were no longer visible to the naked eye. The prospect of such a doom for anyone like Peter Quentin, who had been with him in so many bigger and better crimes, cast a shadow of great melancholy across his spirits.

"Didn't Kathleen try to stop you?" he asked.

"Of course not," said Peter proudly. "She helped me. I owe—"

"—it all to her," said the Saint cynically. "All right. I know the line. But if you ever come out with 'My Work' within my hearing, I shall throw you under a bus . . . You'd better let me see this letter. And order me some more Old Curio while I'm reading it—I need strength."

He took the document with his fingertips, as if it were unclean, and opened it out on the bar. But after his first glance at the letter-head his twinkling blue eyes steadied abruptly, and he read the epistle through with more than ordinary interest.

Dear Sir,

We have now gone into your novel THE GAY ADVENTURER, and our readers report that it is very entertaining and ably written, with the verve of Dumas, the dramatic power of Tolstoy, and ingenuity of Conan Doyle.

We shall therefore be delighted to set up same in best small pica type to form a volume of about 320 p.p., machine on good antique paper, bind in red cloth with title in gold lettering, and put up in specially designed artistic wrapper, at cost to yourself of only £600 (Six Hundred Pounds) and to publish same at our own expense in the United Kingdom at a net price of 15/ (Fifteen Shillings); and believe it will form a most acceptable and popular volume which should command a wide sale.

We will further agree to send you on date of publication twelve presentation copies, and to send copies for review to all principal magazines and newspapers; and further to pay you a royalty of 25% (twenty-five per cent) on all copies sold of this Work.

The work can be put in hand immediately on receipt of your acceptance of these terms.

Trusting to hear from you at your earliest convenience,

We beg to remain, dear Sir,

Faithfully yours, for
HERBERT G. PARSTONE & Co.
Herbert G. Parstone,
Managing Director

Simon folded the letter and handed it back with a sigh of relief.

"Okay, Peter," he said cheerfully. "I bought that one. What's the swindle, and can I come in on it?"

"I don't know of any swindle," said Peter puzzledly. "What do you mean?"

The Saint frowned. "D'you mean to tell me you sent your book to Parstone in all seriousness?"

"Of course I did. I saw an advertisement of his in some literary paper, and I don't know much about publishers—"

"You've never heard of him before?"

"No."

Simon picked up his glass and strengthened himself with a deep draught.

"Herbert G. Parstone," he said, "is England's premier exponent of the publishing racket. Since you don't seem to know it, Peter, let me tell you that no reputable publisher in this or any other country publishes books at the author's expense, except an occasional highly technical work which goes out for posterity rather than profit. I gather that your book is by no means technical. Therefore you don't pay the publisher: he pays you—and if he's any use he stands you expensive lunches as well."

"But Parstone offers to pay—"

"A twenty-five per cent royalty. I know. Well, if you were something like a best seller you might get that; but on a first novel no publisher would give you more than ten, and then he'd probably lose money. After six months Parstone would probably send you a statement showing a sale of two hundred copies, you'd get a cheque from him for thirty-seven pounds ten, and that's the last trace you'd see of your six hundred quid. He's simply trading on the fact that one out of every three people you meet thinks he could write a book if he tried, one out of every three of 'em try it, and one out of every three of those tries to get it published.

"The very fact that a manuscript is sent to him tells him that the author is a potential sucker, because anyone who's going into the writing business seriously takes the trouble to find out a bit about publishers before he starts slinging his stuff around. The rest of his game is just playing on the vanity of mugs. And the mugs—mugs like yourself, Peter—old gents with political theories, hideous women with ghastly poems, schoolgirls with nauseating love stories—rush up to pour their money into his lap for the joy of seeing their repulsive tripe in print. I've known about Herbert for many years, old lad, but I never thought

you'd be the sap to fall for him."

"I don't believe you," said Peter glumly.

An elderly mouse-like man who was drinking at the bar beside him coughed apologetically and edged bashfully nearer.

"Excuse me, sir," he said diffidently, "but your friend's telling the truth."

"How do you know?" asked Peter suspiciously. "I can usually guess when he's telling the truth—he makes a face as if it hurt him."

"He isn't pulling your leg this time, sir," said the man. "I happen to be a proof-reader at Parstone's."

The surprising thing about coincidences is that they so often happen. The mouse-like man was one of those amazing accidents on which the fate of nations may hinge, but there was no logical reason why he should not have been drinking at that bar as probably as at any other hostel in the district. And yet there is no doubt that if Mr. Herbert Parstone could have foreseen the accident he would have bought that particular public-house for the simple pleasure of closing it down lest any such coincidence should happen; but unhappily for him Mr. Herbert Parstone was not a clairvoyant.

This proof-reader—the term, by the way, refers to the occupation and not necessarily to the alcoholic content of the man—had been with Parstone for twelve years, and he was ready for a change.

"I was with Parstone when he was just a small jobbing printer," he said, "before he took up this publishing game. That's all he is now, really—a printer. But he's going to have to get along without me. In the last three years I've taken one cut after another, till I don't earn enough money to feed myself properly; and I can't stand it any longer. I've got four more months on my contract, but after that I'm going to take another job."

"Did you read my book?" asked Peter.

The man shook his head.

"Nobody read your book, sir—if you'll excuse my telling you. It was just put on a shelf for three weeks, and after that Parstone sent you his usual letter. That's what happens to everything that's sent in to him. If he gets his money, the book goes straight into the shop, and the proof-reader's the first man who has to wade through it. Parstone doesn't care whether it's written in Hindustani."

"But surely," protested Peter half-heartedly, "he couldn't carry on a racket like that in broad daylight and get away with it?"

The reader looked at him with a

rather tired smile on his mouse-like features.

"It's perfectly legal, sir. Parstone publishes the book. He prints copies and sends them around. It isn't his fault if the reviewers won't review it and the booksellers won't buy it. He carries out his legal undertaking. But it's a dirty business."

After a considerably longer conversation, in the course of which a good deal more Scotch was consumed, Peter Quentin was convinced. He was so crestfallen on the way home that Simon took pity on him.

"Let me read this opus," he said, "if you've got a spare copy. Maybe it isn't so lousy, and if there's anything in it we'll send it along to some other place."

He had the book next day; and after ploughing through the first dozen pages his worst fears were realised. Peter Quentin was not destined to take his place in the genealogy of literature with Dumas, Tolstoy, and Conan Doyle. The art of writing was not in him. His spelling had a grand simplicity that would have delighted the more progressive orthographists, his grammatical constructions followed in the footsteps of Gertrude Stein, and his punctuation marks seemed to have more connection with intervals for thought and opening beer-bottles than with the requirements of syntax. Moreover, like most first novels, it was embarrassingly personal.

It was this fact which made Simon follow it to the bitter end, for the hero of the story was one "Ivan Grail, the Robbin Hood of modern crime," who could without difficulty be identified with the Saint himself, his "beutifull wife," and "Frank Morris his acomplis whos hard-biten featurs consealed a very clever brain and witt." Simon Templar swallowed all the flattering evidences of hero-worship that adorned the untidy pages, and actually blushed. But after he had reached the conclusion—inscribed "FINNIS" in triumphant capitals—he did some heavy thinking.

Later on he saw Peter again.

"What was it that bit your features so hard?" he asked. "Did you try to kiss an alligator?"

Peter turned pink. "I had to describe them somehow," he said defensively.

"You're too modest," said the Saint, after inspecting him again. "They were not merely bitten—they were thoroughly chewed."

"Well, what about the book?" said Peter hopefully. "Was it any good?"

"It was lousy," Simon informed him, with the privileged candour of friendship. "It would have made Dumas turn in his grave. All the same, it may be more readable after I've revised it for you. And perhaps we will let Comrade Parstone publish it after all."

Peter blinked. "But I thought—"

"I have an idea," said the Saint. "Parstone has published dud books too long. It's time he had a good one. Will you get your manuscript back from him, Peter—tell him you want to make a few corrections, and that you'll send him his money and let him print it. For anyone who so successfully conceals a very clever brain and wit," he added cruelly, "there are much more profitable ways of employing them than writing books, as you ought to know."

For two weeks after that the Saint sat at his typewriter for seven hours a day, hammering out page after page of neat manuscript at astonishing speed. He did not merely revise Peter Quentin's story—he rewrote it from cover to cover, and the result would certainly not have been recognised by its original creator.

The book was sent in again from his own address, and consequently Peter did not see the proofs. Simon Templar read them himself; and his ribs were aching long before he had finished.

The Gay Adventurer, by Peter Quentin, was formally pushed out upon a callous world about two months later. The *Times* did not notice it, the library buyers did not refill their fountain pens to sign the order forms, the lynx-eyed scouts of Hollywood did not rush in with open contracts; but nevertheless it was possible for a man with vast patience and dogged determination to procure a copy, by which achievement Mr. Parstone had fulfilled the letter of his contract.

Simon Templar did not need to exercise patience and determination to obtain his copy, because the author's presentation dozen came to his apartment; and it happened that Peter Quentin came there on the same morning.

Peter noticed the open parcel of books, and fell on them at once, whinnying like an eager stallion. But he had scarcely glanced over the first page when he turned to the Saint with wrathful eyes.

"This isn't my book at all," he shouted indignantly.

"We'll call it a collaboration if you like," said the Saint generously. "But I thought you might as well have the credit. My name is so famous already—"

Peter had been turning the pages frantically.

"But this—this is awful!" he expostulated. "It's—it's—"

"Of course it is," agreed the Saint. "And that's why you must never tell anyone that I had anything to do with it. When the case comes to court, I shall expect you to perjure yourself blue in the face on that subject."

After the revelations that have been made in the early stages of this story, no one will imagine that on the same morning Mr. Herbert Parstone was pacing feverishly up and down his office, quivering with anxiety and parental pride, stopping every now and then to peer at the latest circulation figures rushed in by scurrying office-boys and bawling frantic orders to an excited staff of secretaries, salesmen, shippers, clerks, exporters, and truck drivers.

As a matter of fact, even the most important and reputable publishers do not behave like tht. They are usually too busy concentrating on mastering that loose shoulder and smooth follow-through which carries the ball well over that nasty bunker on the way to the fourteenth.

Mr. Herbert Parstone was not playing golf, because he had a bad cold; and he was in his office when the Saint called. The name on the card that was sent in to him was unfamiliar, but Mr. Parstone never refused to see anyone who was kind enough to walk into his parlour.

He was a short ginger-haired man with the kind of stomach without which no morning coat and gold watch-chain can be seen to their best advantage; and the redness of his prominent nose was not entirely due to his temporary affliction.

"Mr. Teblar?" he said, with great but obstructed geniality. "Please sit dowd. I dode thig I've had the pleasure of beetig you before, have I?"

"I don't think so," said the Saint pleasantly. "But any real pleasure is worth waiting for." He took the precious volume which he was carrying from under his arm, and held it up. "Did you publish this?"

Mr. Parstone looked at it. "Yes," he said, "that is one of our publicashuds. A bost excelledd ad ibportad book, if I bay perbid byself to say so. A book, I bight say, which answers problebs which are dear to every wud of us today."

"It will certainly have some problems to answer," said the Saint; "and I expect they'll be dear enough. Do you know the name of the principal character in this

book? Do you know who this biography is alleged to be about?"

"Biography?" stammered Mr. Parstone, blinking at the cover. "The book is a dovel. A work of fickshud. It is clearly explaid—"

"The book is supposed to be a biography," said the Saint. "And do you know the name of the principal character?"

Mr. Parstone's brow creased with thought.

"Pridcipal character?" he repeated. "Led be see, led be see. I ought to dough, oughtud I?" He blew his nose several times, sniffed, sighed, and spread out his hand uncertainly. "Iddn it abazing?" he said. "The dabe was od the tip of by tug, but dow I cadd rebember id."

"The name is Simon Templar," said the Saint grimly; and Mr. Parstone sat up.

"What?" he ejaculated.

Simon opened the book and showed him the name in plain print. Then he took it away to a chair and lighted a cigarette.

"Rather rude of you, wasn't it?" he murmured.

"Well, by dear Bister Teblar," said Parstone winningly. "I trust you are dot thinkig that any uncomblibendary refereddds was intended. Far frob id. These rebarkable coidcidedces will happud. Ad yet it is dot every yug bad of your age who fides his dabe preserved for posterity id such a work as that. The hero of that book, as I rebember him, was a fellow of outstaddig charb—"

"He was a low criminal," said the Saint virtuously. "Your memory is failing you, Herbert. Let me read you some of the best passages."

He turned to a page he had marked.

"Listen to this, Herbert," he said. "*'Simon Templar was never particular about how he made money, so long as he made it. The drug traffic was only one of his many sources of income, and his conscience was never touched by the thought of the hundreds of lives he ruined by his insatiable avarice. Once, in a night club, he pointed out to me a fine and beautiful girl on whose lovely face the ravages of dope were already beginning to make their mark. "I've had two thousand pounds from her since I started her on the stuff," he said gloatingly, "and I'll have five thousand more before it kills her." I could multiply instances of that kind by the score, and refrain only from fear of nauseating my readers. Sufficient, at least, has already been said to show what an unspeakable ruffian was this man who*

called himself the Saint.' "

However hard it might have been for Mr. Parstone to place the name of Simon Templar, he was by no means ignorant of the Saint. His watery eyes popped halfway out of their sockets, and his jaw hardened at the same time.

"So you're the Saind?" he said.

"Of course," murmured Simon.

"Id your very own words, a low cribidal—"

Simon shook his head.

"Oh, no, Herbert," he said. "By no means as low as that. My reputation may be bad, but it's only rumour. You may whisper it to your friends, but the law doesn't allow you to put it in writing. That's libel. And you couldn't even get Chief Inspector Teal to testify that my record would justify anything like the language this book of yours has used about me.

"My sins were always fairly idealistic, and devoted to the squashing of beetles like yourself—not to trading in drugs and grinding the faces of the poor. But you haven't heard anything like the whole of it. Listen to some more."

He turned to another selected passage.

" *'The Saint',*" he read, " *'always seemed to derive a peculiar malicious pleasure from robbing and swindling those who could least afford to lose. To my dying day, I shall be haunted by the memory of the fiendish glee which distorted his face when he told me that he had stolen five pounds from a woman with seven children, who had scraped and saved for months to get the money together. He accepted the money from her as a fee for trying to trace the grave of her father, who had been reported "missing" in 1943. Of course he never made any attempt to carry out his share of the bargain. He played this cruel trick on several occasions, and always with the same sadistic pleasure, which I believe meant far more to him than the actual cash which he derived from it.'* "

"Is that id the book too?" asked Parstone hoarsely.

"Naturally," said the Saint. "That's what I'm reading it from. And there are lots more interesting things. Look here. *'The bogus companies floated by Templar, in which thousands upon thousands of widows and orphans were deprived—'* "

"Wait!" interrupted Parstone tremblingly. "This is terrible—a terrible coidcideds. The book will be withdrawd at wuds. Hardly eddywud will have had tibe to read it. Ad if eddy sball cobbensation I cad give—"

Simon closed his book with a

smile and laid it on Mr. Parstone's desk.

"Shall we say fifty thousand pounds?" he suggested affably.

Mr. Parstone's face reddened to the verge of an apoplectic stroke, and he brought up his handkerchief with shaking hands.

"How buch?" he whispered.

"Fifty thousand pounds," repeated the Saint. "After all, that's a very small amount of damages to ask for a libel like this. If the case has to go to court, I think it will be admitted that never in the whole history of modern law has such a colossal libel been put on paper. If there is any crime under the sun of which I'm not accused in that book, I'll sit down right now and eat it. And there are three hundred and twenty pages of it—eighty thousand words of continuous and unbridled insult. For a thing like that, Herbert, I think fifty thousand pounds is pretty cheap."

"You could'n get it," said Parstone harshly. "It's the author's liability—"

"I know that clause," answered the Saint coolly, "and you may be interested to know that it has no legal value whatever. In a successful libel action, the author, printer, and publisher are joint tortfeasors, and none of them can indemnify the other. Ask your solicitor. As a matter of fact," he added prophetically, "I don't expect I shall be able to recover anything from the author, anyway. Authors are usually broke. But you are both the printer and publisher, and I'm sure I can collect from you."

Mr. Parstone stared at him with blanched lips.

"But fifty thousad pouds is ibpossible," he whined. "It would ruid be!"

"That's what I mean to do, dear old bird," said the Saint gently. "You've gone on swindling a lot of harmless idiots for too long already, and now I want you to see what it feels like when it happens to you."

He stood up, and collected his hat.

"I'll leave you the book," he said, "in case you want to entertain yourself some more. But I've got another copy; and if I don't receive your cheque by the first post on Friday morning it will go straight to my solicitors. And you can't kid yourself about what that will mean."

For a long time after he had gone Mr. Herbert Parstone sat quivering in his chair. And then he reached out for the book and began to skim through its pages. And with every page his livid face went greyer. There was no doubt about

it. Simon Templar had spoken the truth. The book was the most monumental libel that could ever have found its way into print. Parstone's brain reeled before the accumulation of calumnies which it unfolded.

His furious ringing of the bell brought his secretary running.

"Fide me that proof-reader!" he howled. "Fide be the dab fool who passed this book!" He flung the volume on to the floor at her feet. "Sed hib to be at wuds! I'll show hib. I'll bake hib suffer. By God, I'll—"

The other things that Mr. Parstone said he would do cannot be recorded in such a respectable publication as this.

His secretary picked up the book and looked at the title.

"Mr. Timmins left yesterday—he was the man you fired four months ago," she said; but even then Mr. Parstone was no wiser.

AN EDITORIAL ASIDE

I have often had occasion to refer to my feeling that violence—and, for that matter, murder—are diseases which respect neither ethnic nor social lines. The urge to kill—the abrupt blinding impulse to violence—is something which is a part of this multi-visaged thing which we call Man; as long as we have walked erect, long before Hammurabi and long after the last bomb has fallen, this one characteristic which makes us all brothers has been and will be a part of us. . . .

With this in mind there is some justification for saying that the mystery novel—more so, certainly, than the much touted novels of the angry young men or the even more touted exercises in subliminal pornography—are genuinely mirrors of these days and these times in which we live. . . I am not now thinking of the latter-day Ruritanian epics where hard-headed private eyes slug it out indescriminately with blondes and gangsters and with bottles of the writer's favorite bourbon. I *am* thinking of the novels, and of stories such as these in this issue of *The Saint*, which can be said to reflect the mores and the manners, whether these be good or bad, of these times. . . .

Edgar winner Henry Slesar tells about an absent-minded murder, and Poul Anderson's extremely interesting detective, Trygve Yamamura, returns in another adventure, THE GENTLE WAY, while Margaret Manners, one of this country's most distinguished writers in this field, returns with the haunting story of an unhappy woman, MY OWN SISTER. Toss Olsen, a newcomer to these pages, reports on a LONESOME KILLER. Veteran pulp writers Tom McClary talks about the days of the Dewey Rackets Investigation and Leonard J. Guardino returns, after much too long an absence, with another story from The Phillipines.

And Leslie Charteris reports on an uncritical publisher—a phenomenon of the publishing scene on both sides of the Atlantic—who attracts Simon Templar's slightly less than Saintly attention. . . .

HANS STEFAN SANTESSON

LONESOME LONESOME KILLER

by TOSS OLSEN

He walked into the bar without swaggering. There was no need. Not for him. The weight of his confidence was comfortable against his thigh. Six tubes filled with the stuff of life or death moved with him; his fingers brushed over the trigger guard as if it were a desirable woman.

At the bar he swung easily into the gunfighter's stance. Left elbow on the bar, right arm dangling loosely with the thumb tucked into the belt just above the buscadero holster.

He called out softly to the bartender. He called again, for the man in the grey, unwashed apron was engrossed in sweeping the change from the bar, hiding it under a soggy rag. Even as the barkeep looked up, the gunman heard the first whisper. His first thought was of his safety and he swung, pivoting on his left elbow until he faced the barroom. His next thought was of gratification. They knew him. And then there was another thought, or better, another reaction. The man who sidled up to him was familiar although he had never met this particular face.

"Excuse me. I recognized you right away. I beg your pardon, but I saw you that day in Abilene. Yessir." His flickering eyes, slightly out

of focus, reminded him of Jack Kinkaid. His eyes had looked the same way after his heavy .44 slug had taken him high in the chest, just above the heart.

"You are Ben Tull? Ain't you?"

Ben nodded.

The bartender was at his shoulder now, interested, ready to tell his kids about the great Ben Tull who drank with both hands because he couldn't hold a glass with one, or who lisped or—it wouldn't matter. The thing was to tell a good story; he could fix up the details later.

"Whisky. A glass of water first and then whisky." Ben Tull was a thin man. Thin and tall with a unique set of muscles and corresponding reflexes that had happened in such a one in a million circumstance as to give him the ability to draw and shoot a Colt repeating pistol faster than any other man he had ever met. And then he had another advantage. Ben Tull did not give a damn.

And Ben Tull had reason. He was dying. He felt it every day. Each second was a tick deep down in the life cycle of Ben Tull. And it was not the passing of his bits of flesh and blood that bothered Ben so. It was the commonplace, the passing of nothing, the day by day emptiness. And he had tasted of the brief seconds when the closeness of death lends color to the skies and taste to the winds and music to the waves. And the life of Ben Tull was ebbing as if it were just a bit of saline water retreating from a barren shore.

The water was cool, almost cold. Something you didn't expect to find in the desert country. They must have a clay *olla* somewhere behind the bar. It lost a little water cooling through evaporation but it was worth it. Ben decided that the owner of the bar might be a good man to do business with. He tossed off the whisky.

"You do everything bassackwards?" The man with the out of focus eyes was still at his shoulder, grinning ingratiatingly. He backed up a step when Ben looked him in the face, not smiling. "I meant the water first and then the whisky . . . you know most folks drink—"

"Tell the boss I want to see him." Ben cut off the obvious explanation. He had stopped being courteous with fools a long time back.

"Mr. Boone. You want to see Mr. Boone? Yes, sir. I'll tell him." He backed away tripped against a support of the bar rail and half trotted to a door at the far end of the forty-foot long bar.

Boone was almost as tall as Ben, but there any comparisons stopped. He was as light as Ben was dark.

And his eyes were clear blue. The kind of eyes that would leave a man an out. Not like Ben's at all. And he was warm. There was a kind of glow that radiated from the man. Ben felt it and it irritated him. Yet this Boone was an older man, near fifty, Ben guessed, and he was a man that he could do business with; so Ben spoke, civilly for him.

"You are the owner?"

"I am the owner. Fortunately or unfortunately. Let the citizens of this unhappy hankering for a city decide. If they decide to vote me out as an evil influence, I may buy the whole township drinks. All three hundred and forty-seven of them—unless you decide to make it forty-eight?"

"Maybe. Depends on you." Ben threw the brown drink down. He had almost forgotten what real whisky tasted like. At least this cantina owner put a bit of whisky in the alcohol. "I want you to give me a little space in the rear of the saloon. Enough for a faro table and maybe poker. I'll split the profits with you."

"And if there are no profits?" Boone smiled and spread his hands out, palm upwards, as if to show that his doubt was impersonal.

"I said split the profits. I'll not ask you to share the losses. Ben poured another drink with his left hand and picked up the glass in the same hand. His right still lay quietly apart from the rest of his body, almost touching the wooden gun butt.

"Done," Boone said. "Bring out a bottle of my private whisky, Jedemiah, I have a new associate."

It was with this simple beginning that the strange association of Ben Tull and Charles Boone was begun—and the even stranger friendship, for Boone became Ben's friend. Ben soon found out that not only were they different in appearance and manner but in all things. Ben's family had been wiped out by Comanches when he was seven years old and he became the silent little boy who did the chores for his food and whatever clothes that fell his way. Boone came from a large Eastern family and lived with his wife and children. Ben had barely learned to read and write from watching one of the older girls at the last family he had been boarded with. Boone had an extensive education and was fond of quoting the classics. And Boone with his expansive extroverted personality had many friends. Ben had never had a friend before.

And Ben stayed on. Even when he had made enough money to carry him on in his quest for nothing. He did so well that Boone drew him

aside one night after the last cowboy shook his head in dismay at his luck and then drifted over to the bar for the drink on the house before making the long ride back to the ranch.

"Ben, are you really that lucky?" Boone cocked his head at Ben.

"No, Boone, I ain't. But a man taught me one time that you got to make half on your gambling capital. I make just that. Half. No more, no less."

"But if you are not lucky, Ben, then . . ."

Ben didn't answer. He picked up the three cards and began flicking them back and forth. He waited for Boone to pick a card and then turned it over. Boone lost. Ben did the same thing ten times without speaking and then grinned.

"Want to play for the saloon?"

"No," Boone grinned back ruefully. "But I will collect on a bet I made some time ago to myself. Boone, old man, I said. If Ben ever breaks his face up into a smile, I will invite him home to eat a meal fit for a human being; for, if he smiles, he must be a mortal man after all." Boone took Ben by the right arm and tried to pull him with him toward the door, but Ben broke free.

"Boone, don't ever tie up my right arm."

"Tie up your—" Boone blinked. "Oh, yes. Sorry, Ben. But you will come to dine. My wife is expecting you."

"You had figured on asking me all the time?" An excitement swept through Ben and from somewhere in his unconscious a picture of a five year old boy eating supper with his own family flashed and was gone. Wetness gathered at the sun wrinkles fanning out from the corners of his eyes.

"I reckon I might."

At that moment the batwing doors swung open and two men came in. Ben felt the hostility and moved to his right, away from Boone and with his back to where the bar made a corner with a wall.

"Not tonight, I guess. Couple of old friends, Boone. Tell the missus I couldn't make it tonight." Ben felt Boone hesitate and he added, "Go on, Boone. This is private business."

Boone hesitated in front of the doors and then pushed on through. His bootsteps sounded on the wooden walk and then faded. The two men moved a step apart.

"That's enough." Ben's voice held them.

The one nearest Ben was balding, hook nosed and had not shaved for years. The other was younger, just into his twenties. He had the same

nose and soft blue eyes of the other man. Ben thought that they must be brothers.

"You be Ben Tull?" The older man's voice was high and bounced from note to note like the loose string of a banjo.

"I'm Ben Tull."

"You kilt Billy."

Ben snapped his eyes from the younger to the older man. They were both trembling. A great calm settled over him and instantly he knew that he would take the bearded man first and then swivel for a shot at the belly of the youth. Of course the boy would get a shot at him, but he would probably miss his first and he wouldn't get off a second. Some long forgotten bit of advice came back to him. *When you shoot at a man with a gun in his hands, get him between the eyes or in the gut. If you get him between the eyes he won't ever do nothing more; in the belly he'll let go of his gun and grab for his guts.*

The young boy moved a bit farther to his right, opening a wider gulf between him and his partner and Ben knew that it was now. He never heard Boone's voice cry out, "Hands up, boys!" He didn't even realize that the two men didn't go for their guns. His action had been started and nothing outside of a bullet through his brain could have stopped him. He shot twice, saw the boy drop and snapped his revolver back to the other danger. Only there was no danger. Ben's bullet had smashed into his right temple and blood was dying his beard and the floor red. *He dropped his gun anyway*, Ben thought.

"Ben! My god in heaven what have you done?"

His thumb snapped back the hammer of the single action revolver from sheer reflex, but he was far enough out of the cool grey shadows of the other world to hear Boone and to see him standing there, the batwing doors holding him in their jaws. Boone was holding a double barrelled shotgun.

"You shot them down in cold blood. Didn't give them a chance!" Boone wore the same expression that Ben had once felt on his own face when he had stumbled and almost fell into an inclining cave filled with squirming rattlers.

"Look, Boone." Ben fumbled for the right words. And while he looked for them he turned the cylinder of his .44 and pushed the two shells out through the loading slot and then replaced them. Boone stepped into the saloon and the doors swung back and forth behind him, sweeping the two bodies with their shadows.

"No, Ben. You look. Look at

yourself. Loading your pistol again so that you can kill some other poor soul. I suppose that you'll borrow a carving knife at dinner and add a couple of notches."

"No, Boone. I told you to go on home. I don't want to have to tell you again. Unless you plan to cut loose at me with that double barrel?"

Boone was quiet then. He knelt by the younger man and put his head to his chest. He looked up at Ben, a sad smile on his lips.

"You may be disappoointed. This one is still alive."

Ben helped him carry the young man to the home of the local handyman who called himself a doctor. The youth was lucky. The doctor was out on his circuit and by the time he returned his patient was out of danger. The bullet had hit the young man's belt buckle and deflected up and out, grazing his right ribs.

That night ended the friendship of Ben Tull and Charles Boone and Ben might well have ridden out of his life forever if he had not found something that before had been nothing but a crude joke and a matter of releasing tension and spending excess money. He fell in love with the daughter of Charles Boone.

Ben had to wait for the circuit judge. A group of stammering, extremely polite men, headed by Boone had asked him to stay in town until the following month when his case could be heard and a jury called up if the judge thought it necessary. Ben heard them out and then turned his back on them and walked away. He took the stage out that night. He went on to Snake River and spent a week gambling and drinking. He felt no need for a woman and at the end of the week he took another stage back.

And that was when he first met Boone's daughter. Only then he didn't know that she was Boone's daughter. His first impression was of a dance hall girl. Later he decided that it must have been because of her white skin made whiter by contrast with hair black as any Apache's. The only women he had known with skin untouched by sun and wind were the drink and dance and then upstairs girls.

Ben studied her carefully. He saw that her eyes were black as her hair, that her nose was straight and that her lips were full. And without understanding he even watched the pink flush through her face. Her voice was high but pleasant to Ben's ears when she spoke.

"Must you stare? Have you never seen a woman before?"

He did not catch the sense to her

words for a moment. When he did he answered. "No to both questions. At least not one like you before. I'm sorry. I'll ride outside."

The stage jerked and Ben fell back into the seat. He righted himself and opened the door. He was half way out when she cried, "No, you will kill yourself. You may stay here," she laughed, "but do not stare. I guess you cowboys do not see girls too often at that."

"I'm not a cowboy."

"Well, you are not dressed like the popular concept of one back home, but you are carrying a gun." She smiled at Ben and Ben felt a silly grin form on his own tight lips.

"Lady, out here even barbers carry guns. At present I happen to be an unemployed gambler."

"Really! A gambler?" She shrieked with delight. "But you are joshing me." She looked at him out of the corner of her eyes, with a smile drifting across her lips like ripples on water.

"And would you tell a poor green Easterner your name?"

"My name is Ben Tull. I would take it as a compliment if you would call me Ben."

"And my name is Sally and you will have to call me Sally for I shall not tell you any other name until you get used to it."

It was a fourteen hour trip and hour by hour Ben's natural reserve went, until he was telling her stories of his childhood, even of those years which he never allowed himself to think, although he dreamed about them during times of depression.

And Sally told him of her life in Boston and of her family who had moved out West and left her to finish school before joining them and how excited she was to see the real West and live on the frontier. Ben found himself promising to take her riding into the desert country and show her real wild Indians. Even while it was happening Ben found a part of him observing this new Ben Tull and making caustic comments, but he didn't care. Life was strong within him and the hollow ache that seemed to be squeezing at his soul was not an unpleasant one. Although he didn't think of himself as being in love, he was.

When the stage bounced over the creek at the township's edge, Sally woke with a start. Her mouth rounded when she realized that she had been sleeping on Ben's shoulder—that he had been holding his arm stiffly behind her head for hours. She started to tell him her thanks and then the stage stopped and she saw her father and mother waiting outside with a young cowboy who seemed to be carrying

something lumpy about his waist, hidden underneath his shirt.

She darted out of the stage into Charles Boone's arms. And while she trilled questions at her father, Ben swung down out of the stage onto the dusty rutted street. Ben stood there staring at Boone and the young man whom he had nearly killed. He rubbed his right arm and watched. Then as he turned to go, Sally noticed him and cried. "Ben. Ben Tull, do come and meet my parents."

"Good day, Boone." He tried to raise his right hand to his hat in greeting, but it was dead and would not move.

"You poor thing," Sally cried out, "I went to sleep on Ben—Mr. Tull's arm and I will wager that he cannot move it. I am sorry."

The young man moved out apart from Boone, his wife and Sally. He was grinning slightly, opening and closing his right hand regularly. "Remember me, Mr. Tull? My name is Clifford Gates. You kilt my bub Billy and my pap. I reckon I'm afixing to repay the . . . the . . ."

"Courtesy," Ben supplied the word. "Go ahead, boy. Start shooting." Ben stood still, the fingers of his left hand trying to push some bit of life into his numb right arm.

Gates hesitated. This wasn't right. Ben Tull didn't seem to care whether they fought or not. His throat constricted and he regretted his move. If that girl had not been there, he never would have been tempted. The man was a professional killer.

"I will thank you both to remember that there are ladies present." Boone's voice boomed out.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Boone, I really do." Clifford Gates turned to Sally and offered her his arm. "I'd take it kindly Miss Boone, if you'd let me see you home."

Sally laughed nervously. She looked at Ben and then at her father. But it was her mother who spoke.

"You go on home Sally. There are things about this town—this country—that you do not understand. Good night, Mr. Tull."

Ben touched his hat with his left hand and then turned his back to the group and walked away into the shadows. Behind him he heard Sally's excited questions, Boone's deep voice answering and then the nasal voice of Gates cutting in. A heavier depression than he could remember settled deep within him and he turned into the only bar in town. That same bar in which he had shot and killed a man a week ago.

The drinking did no good and at daybreak Ben pulled his horse out

of the stable and rode down to Prospector's Creek. He turned his big black gelding loose and then sat with his back against a scrub cedar. He rolled one cigarette after another. The sun was high and Ben had just shifted into the shade when he heard the hoofbeats of two horses. He dropped his right hand to his gun butt and waited. It had been a useless move. Sally Boone and a towheaded boy of about twelve rode up. The boy's eyes were as wide as his mouth when he saw Ben.

"Sis! It's Ben Tull."

"*It is* Sammy. Do not make contractions. Good morning, Ben."

"Ben!" The boy named Sammy turned wide blue eyes on a sister who had just risen innumerably in the scales of a rather demanding younger brother.

"Good morning, Sally." Ben sprang to his feet and brushed bits of straggly needles and twigs from his black trousers. "I didn't—did not expect to meet anyone out here."

Her laugh trilled out. "See, Sammy. Ben Tull does not speak vulgarly. We came on a picnic. And you must join us. That is if Sammy does not object?"

"Huh, me?" Sammy shook his head violently, side to side. Ben was bewildered and showed it.

"I would be proud to join you, but . . ." Ben let the words trail off. He knew that Sally would understand. His chest lightened when she insisted and then he knew that he, Ben Tull, the gunfighter, had a chance with this wonderful girl and for the moment nothing else mattered. She discovered that the salt was missing and sent a grumbling Sammy to fetch it. Then eyes flashing with mischief, she showed Ben where she had hidden the lost folded paper of salt.

In a few hours Ben discovered that a woman's smile could brighten up a sky more than the knowledge that sudden death is near and that gunsmoke was nothing compared with the sweet smell of a lovely girl. Ben Tull began to live.

In his direct way he wanted to march up to the Boone house and declare himself, but Sally would have none of it. She could do anything with her father, given enough time, she explained. Sammy was sworn to secrecy and their picnics went on. Ben lost count of time. It didn't matter that Sally went to dances or to church socials—not even when he saw her walking with Clifford Gates. Ben tipped his hat and walked on and when Sally giggled, he laughed silently.

And then it was the day of his trial.

Ben knew the circuit judge. He had been a marshal for him in the old days. It had ended as he knew it would. When two armed men come after another who has killed one of their own, a man is entitled to save himself. And any man raised in the West would have tried for the first shot. Only a fool would let the other man make the first move. Still Clifford Gates spoke loudly against the verdict.

"If a man's been a marshal once he can kill who he wants and nobody says a thing. Well us Gates don't think that way. I knew I shouldn't have waited for the trial. I let someone talk me out of getting Ben Tull afore this. I won't make that mistake again."

The boy was dead wrong and yet he was right too. Ben knew that. A man lost a brother and a father and it didn't matter that he, Ben Tull, had no choice but to kill or be killed. The boy wouldn't see it that way. Still Ben walked over to where young Gates stood, angry-eyed and lips twisted in a snarl. Boone was at his side.

Ben spoke slowly, measuring his words and their tone.

"I want you to know I am sorry. Your brother drew on me and I had to shoot him. You and your daddy were out to get me. I know that hating me is something you can't help. But I tell you this, leave me alone and I'll not bother you." Ben turned to go, but Gates called him back.

"I'll not leave you be. Not until you're rotting in the ground. And if you don't stay away from my girl, it'll be that much sooner."

"Your girl?"

"My girl. Sally." Ben's eyes registered the shock and Gates was quick to follow his advantage. "Oh, I know about your little picnics. We figured that it would keep you out of my way until the trial—and maybe she did figure to make me a little jealous. But it's over now, hear?"

Ben nodded and walked away. Boone caught up to him outside as he took his gunbelt from the bailiff and buckled it on. "Ben! You do not know girls. It is only natural to play one man against another. Ben! Are you listening?"

Ben nodded and turned, walking fast. Boone trotted after him.

"Then where are you going?"

"To say goodbye to Sally."

"And then what? Will you hunt that boy down and kill him, just because he pleases her a bit more?"

And Boone knew about it too, Ben thought. Not that he could blame Sally. Why she had picked him to use for bait for the man who had sworn to kill him was strange.

Although, he remembered, he had seen dance hall girls egg men on into killing each other. Maybe they were all the same cut at that.

"Ben, why not just ride out of town?"

Ben stopped so suddenly that Boone passed him. Ben unbuckled his gun belt and handed it to Boone.

"Get my horse for me. I'll be back in a few minutes and I'll leave you and this town behind forever. Just let me say goodbye."

—

She was waiting on the porch when Ben walked up. Freshly dressed in white crinoline, her hair was never so black. Ben stopped and looked up without speaking. Her cheeks were flushed and she waited for him to speak.

"I came to say goodbye, Sally." In the seconds that he waited for her answer he became aware of his pulse and the regular beat throbbed in his ears.

"You are leaving Ben?"

"I thought I might ride west."

"Then you will be leaving for good?" Her voice was cool, Ben thought, as if she might be controlling its tone, trying to be friendly.

"Yes, for good," he answered.

"Goodbye then."

Ben stared for a long moment, turned and walked away. He had not taken more than ten steps when Clifford Gates called him down.

"Now, Mister Ben Tull. I reckon this will be the time. Reach!"

"I'm not carrying a gun." Ben blinked at Gates, not really understanding, still thinking of picnics by the river and the warm sun and secret confidences.

"Ain't that too bad. Not that I believe you. Ben Tull without a gun!" He raised his voice for the others to hear. "You low-down murderer. Draw!"

Ben felt a great weariness. It didn't seem very important that he was about to die. Detached, mildly curious, he watched the scene. He heard Sally scream and noticed Boone off to one side. Boone threw something at him and he caught it with a reflex action. It was his gun belt. His hand went to the gun naturally. And Gates stopped his own draw with his hand on his gun.

Ben buckled on the gun and waited until Gates lifted his hand from his gun, then nodded and turned his back on Gates. He faced Boone.

"Thanks. Did you order my horse—"

The first bullet cut through his side. There was no pain, just numbness. The slug whirled him around so that he was set when the second slug took him someplace down low, in the groin or upper leg. When

Gates saw him still standing there with his gun lifted ready to fire, he panicked, and running sideways, fired three more slugs, wildly. Ben stood rock still, following the boy's flight with his revolver barrel. Watched him run, a man with an empty gun, half crazy with fear. Gates clambered on his horse and spurred the horse out of town, away from Ben Tull. Ben held his breath tight against the pulsing blood. He beckoned to Boone.

"My horse?"

"Of course." Boone peered at Ben, concern showing. "Ben, you could have killed that boy. I am proud you did not." He coughed uneasily. "Would you rather stay on? My saloon never did so well as when you were my partner."

"Please, Ben. Do as Daddy says." Sally was a blurred white figure alongside Boone.

"I didn't figure you wanted me to, Sally. What with Clifford Gates and you taking me on those picnics to keep me away from him."

Ben swayed a bit and then straightened.

"Ben, you fool. That was to keep you from killing him—or being shot in the back."

"Guess I'll stay," Ben said and almost fell, Boone caught him.

"You're hit," Boone cried.

"I reckon I am, but not bad. And don't—do not use contractions."

Sally giggled hysterically and then slipped Ben's arm over her shoulder. Boone took the other and they helped him into Boone's home.

FLASH! LESLIE CHARTERIS ANALYZES THE DETROIT LASSITER CASE IN THE ISSUE OF *OFFICIAL DETECTIVE* NOW ON SALE!

H.S.S.

OUR APOLOGIES

The Copyright lines were unfortunately omitted with the last two Saint stories published in this magazine. These should have been—

THE DAMSEL IN DISTRESS, from THE SAINT INTERVENES,
Copyright © 1934 by Leslie Charteris

THE MAN WHO LIKED ANTS, from THE HAPPY HIGHWAYMAN
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My Own Sister

by MARGARET MANNERS

Long before the decision was made that she was to go back into the world they kept telling her that she was not to think about it any more. Everything was perfectly normal, just as it should be. But Ella was a very simple person and it seemed wrong to her. Day and night she worried because she felt no guilt. She'd always been feather-brained and forgetful, of course, but to have committed a murder without knowing it . . . ! Really, nothing could make that right. You had to suffer for it in your soul.

She accepted but did not quite understand the sophisticated reasoning of the doctors who told her that at the time of her crime she had been a different person, and that the person she was now should not be held accountable for what that other Ella had done. And it was quite understandable, they insisted, that she should feel nothing and have no memory of the event. It was a peculiar mental condition, but not at all rare in people of her type. Temporary insanity was just a phrase the doctors said, she shouldn't be upset by it.

Still, she couldn't understand that she had killed her younger sister just like that, out of a clear sky. It was years now, of course, simply years and years away, but time did

not help her to understand it.

She had tried to explain to them that she wasn't jealous because Laura was beautiful and had many admirers. She had loved Laura and been proud of her popularity, even though it was annoying always to be the one who ironed the party dresses at the last minute, or sewed up the hems torn out by dancing feet.

Then they told her about this inside part of herself that *was* jealous and unreasonable and unkind, no matter how much the top part of her went around loving Laura. In fact, they said, the greater her underneath resentment had been, the more loving she would have become on the outside. They knew what they were talking about, of course, but it was all very shocking. They revealed her to herself as a hypocrite, and then they said she wasn't to be upset, because everybody was like that really. There had been a split somewhere between the two parts, and the other one, the bad one, had killed her sister. When she tried to understand this she visualized a two-layer cake, bottom half nasty, top half nice, without enough filling in between to hold the two halves together.

Facts didn't help her. She had learned all that she knew of her crime during the trial. Where the memory of murder ought to be in her mind there was a great blank space. Something she could never fill to her satisfaction. Everyone had been kind. Evidence of her mental slowness and lapses of memory had been supplied in abundance by her sister Anne and by many loving friends.

After the trial, when they sent her away to that special place for people like her, she would sit for hours helplessly trying to remember, repeating to herself the information that had been given to her at the trial.

"Something snapped in me," she told herself. "Anne was in the kitchen pounding the steak to make it tender. I went upstairs to the bedroom. Laura was dressing in front of the fireplace. She was going riding with Ralph. The engagement ring was shining on her hand. I beat her on the head with the poker. Then I walked out into the garden and fell asleep with the bloody poker beside me."

She had been away a long time. The doctors and nurses had been wonderfully good to her. Everything had been safe and pleasant. They had taught her to make baskets and paint pictures, and then to sew dresses, and eventually she was given a permanent wave and a charm course. She wasn't young,

but she was attractive now. More so than before, much more. Except for that certain vagueness, which Anne said she had always had anyway, she was really a nice, normal human being.

She had heard one of the doctors say, "There's many an empty headed blonde with men falling over themselves to do things for her, that hasn't got a bit more sense than Ella has. A little male admiration is all she needs and mark my words, she'll get it. Make it clear to her sister that when she goes home she mustn't be wrapped in absorbent cotton, she mustn't think she's queer or different."

She had one terrible fear—that Anne would be afraid to have her in the house. She couldn't think of a life outside for herself without Anne. There had been the three of them together after Daddy died, Anne, Laura and herself. And then she had! . . . She could live without poor Laura, yes, but never without Anne.

To her great relief, Anne had been wonderful, eager to have her, gentle, tender. She was deeply grateful to Anne.

"You're not afraid of me?" she had asked timidly.

"Nonsense! Afraid of my own sister?"

She was comforted. But then it occurred to her . . . "I was Laura's own sister too," she whispered.

Anne bit her lips. "Darling, that wasn't you. That was nothing to do with the you you are now. Really and truly, Ella, I'd as soon be afraid of myself."

Very much what the doctors had said. But afterwards she felt upset again. "Why?" she kept asking herself, "why don't I feel guilty? Why don't I suffer? After all I am a murderess. I murdered my sister!" But it didn't seem real to her even as she accused herself. It was like a story she was reading, or something she had heard.

It was so unreal that she expected to wake up any minute and find that it had all never happened. That the old life was still with them. Laura would be alive and beautiful. The men would be calling to take her out. Anne and she weren't very pretty, or at least not in the same way (Ella blushed as she remembered Laura's opulence). Anne and she would be standing on the porch waving good-night to Laura and calling out in that singsong way, "Have a good time!" Then she would go indoors with Anne and they'd do the dishes and listen to the radio, and Anne would mend and darn.

It had been like that the night Laura came home very late, breath-

less and flushed, to tell them that she was engaged to Ralph. Ella had been standing with Anne at the window and had seen him kiss Laura on the porch before they came in. It had made her knees weak just to watch.

He had stood there with her in the hall a little while, masculine, awkward, hat in hand. "After all the years I've taken out the Bentley girls," he had said proudly, looking at Anne and then at herself, "here I go marrying one!" He must have been embarrassed to make such an oafish remark. He had proposed to Anne once, but that was years before, and she had refused him. There had been a time he had almost proposed to Ella, but she had already made up her mind to refuse him too, and he seemed to have read her mind because he had never asked.

Both Anne and she had been delighted. At least, at the time she had thought she was delighted. But somewhere inside the news had angered her, the doctors said. The next day she had killed Laura with the poker.

Everybody knew that she'd had these little lapses all her life. For a while she'd go blank, and not remember that she'd met people or talked to them. They used to make fun of her for it. But not after Laura's death. That was too terrible!

"I wish I could feel sorry," she thought. "There must be something wrong with me. It just seems as it it never happened."

But they all assured her that was just how she ought to feel and told her not to worry.

It was nice to be home with Anne. Anne was good to her, so patient and understanding. It was only when Anne used the word 'sister' that Ella felt uneasy and the soft glow of their days together was dimmed for her.

She kept telling herself that it was all right, that she couldn't possibly be resenting Anne's beauty, because Anne wasn't beautiful and she was much older. "I can't mind her men friends either, she thought gratefully, "because she hasn't got any."

She worried gently and steadily about Anne's cooking. It was very good. Perhaps she was jealous of that! It did seem ridiculous, but she knew now that you could resent all sorts of things without recognizing the fact consciously. Since she was a kind person and didn't want to harm Anne, she worried.

Every time she picked up a sharp knife in the kitchen she thought about it. "She lets me peel the vegetables," she would think proudly.

And then some part of her would be afraid that this was only a manifestation of some deeper feeling that she was slighted because she was not allowed to do the cooking. She would drop the knife in consternation and stand there.

"What is it, Ella?" Anne would say. "Dreaming again, darling?"

But there it was. How could you ever trust yourself again? They said she was quite well now. But was she?

She would wake in the night from a dream in which she had been pommelling a smiling Laura. But Laura would only laugh and say, "Stop tickling me, Ella!" And that certainly didn't seem a proper dream of atonement, did it?

Anne tried to follow the doctor's orders and get her out with people There were difficulties. They had only a small income and couldn't sell the house so they had to stay right there on the outskirts of town. Everyone tried to help, and she was invited to several large parties. But she noticed she was never left alone with anyone but Anne. People always approached her in a group. Really, Anne was wonderful!

She decided at last that it was her duty to point out to Anne the risk that she was running.

"But, Anne, don't you think it would be safer if I went back there? I mean, I *feel* perfectly all right, and I love you very much, but suppose . . ." The sentence trailed off. It wasn't the sort of thing one could say to a generous, self-sacrificing loved one.

And then in alarm, she thought, "Do I resent her generosity? Do I mind all she does for me? I'm grateful because she takes care of me this way, but if I'm thinking of harming her, it wouldn't be much of a way to show my gratitude!"

Anne refused even to think of her going back to the mental home. That annoyed Ella just a little bit. Here she was trying to protect her sister and . . . Well, really, Anne was *too* long-suffering to be true!

It was when she was in the back yard chopping kindling that she had her first realization of the depths in herself. She was working busily with the ax when she saw the chicken. It was a plump, sleek cockerel that Anne was going to kill that evening for their Sunday dinner. Ella had always been too squeamish to do anything like that. Now she thought, "I don't know why I shouldn't? After all, it seems silly, when I . . ."

She began to chase the chicken around the yard.

It was an annoyingly nimble bird. By the time she caught it, her hair was in her eyes, she'd stubbed her

toe and scratched her hand badly. With real enthusiasm she lopped off the chicken's head, almost without thinking about it. Blood got over everything. She realized she'd done it badly. Anne was always so neat.

As she stood there holding the decapitated bird Anne came out of the kitchen door with a pan of feed. Their eyes met and suddenly the feed was all over the yard and the tin pan rolling at her feet. Anne was staring at her as if she were the public executioner.

She realized that she must look frightful with the blood, and her hair flying, but there was no need for Anne to appear so frightened. It was tactless, to say the least.

That night the super table was very quiet. When the radio began an eerie mystery play Anne leaned over and shut it off with a brusque twist of the dial.

"Are you afraid of me, Anne?" Ella couldn't help asking it.

"Of course not, dear!" Anne was very busy looking for some darning thread that was right under her nose. "Why do you ask that so often? Should I be afraid?"

"I don't know," Ella said truthfully and went up to bed.

She put a chair under her doorknob so that if she walked in her sleep or anything . . . At the same time she felt that the precaution would be quite useless if the notion took her.

The next day Anne had an accident. Ella had been polishing the stairs and the doorbell rang. She had gone to answer it forgetting to take the polish with her. Anne, coming down the steps in a hurry stepped into it and was thrown. Fortunately, except for a bruise or two, she was unhurt.

Ella felt dreadful and apologized every time she thought of it, which was every ten minutes.

Thinking about it opened terrible vistas. She looked down into those places in herself that the doctors had talked about. Could this awful person inside be trying to do something to Anne? Had she *wanted* to forget that can of polish?

Life became a complex business indeed. Ella would catch Anne watching her carefully at odd moments, and she no longer asked her to peel the vegetables. At last she cornered her sister and said what was on her mind.

"There's no use," she said, ringing her hands in desperation. "I just don't know any more what I'm doing, or what's in my mind. The simple truth is that I think I'm going to murder you as I murdered Laura. I don't think I want to, but I can't be sure, so. . ."

She went closer to her sister.

After all, it was a dreadful thing she was saying, and she wanted to assure Anne of her good will. She reached out a trembling hand . . .

Somehow Anne was across the room and the table was between them.

"Stop imagining things!" Anne said sharply. "Stop it! There's nothing the matter with you at all. You're just not very bright."

"I know." Ella was sad. "But it's a terrible thing to have hanging over you. I literally don't know what I'll do next."

The room was very quiet. Anne said, "Sit down, Ella, I want to talk to you." Again there was a long silence. Ella waited nervously until her sister spoke.

"You're scatter-brained, Ella. A bit vague and forgetful, but *that's all!* You're in danger of talking yourself into other things. If I'm not careful you'll . . . I'd better tell you and put your mind at rest. You didn't kill Laura. I did!"

The clock clicked. Ella smiled at her sister. Anne must think she was an awful fool if she thought she'd believe that!"

Anne shook her head. "It's true! I didn't intend to. She stood there flaunting her engagement to Ralph. She should have refused him. There were two of us to be married first. She was the youngest. I'd refused Ralph years before because I thought the two of you needed me. She was a flirt, and you were so forgetful and thoughtless I didn't know what would happen to you without me.

"She said something nasty and I hit her with the poker. I'd taken it to put the burned paper back in the grate. She'd been burning all the letters from the others. And then I couldn't stop. I just went on beating her and beating her. You were dozing in the garden. Everyone knew you had these spells when you'd forget what you'd done. I knew you'd get away with it, just as you did. I intended to make it up to you. I will make it up to you. I'm very fond of you, Ella."

Ella was back in the garden, half sleeping, half waking, hearing forgotten sounds, birds, hens, the distant bark of a dog, and that other noise. "So it wasn't the steak you were pounding!" she said, aghast.

She thought it over for a bit. "That's why I didn't feel guilty. I hadn't done it! Anne! You've no idea what a relief that is to me."

But what I'm saying is shocking, she thought.

She supposed that she'd lived too long with the horror to her own murder to react very violently to Anne's. "So I don't have any wish to kill you at all?" she marvelled.

Anne nodded.

"Well!" Ella said reproachfully, "I wish you'd told me sooner. If you *knew* what I've been through!"

Anne started to say something but Ella stopped her.

"No, it isn't just that. I suppose it was terrible to let them try me for murder and send me away, but I realize it would have been worse for you. Why they'd have sentenced you to death! All the same I do think you might have told me."

"What are you going to do? You aren't afraid of me, are you, Ella? We've always been happy together. As long as I live I'll look after you."

"Oh, be quiet!" Ella was still occupied with untangling the turmoil of the years when she had been treated as an absentminded murderess. "I might have known," she said to herself exultantly, 'those doctors!"

"Don't be afraid of me, Ella, please!"

Ella didn't like Anne to be so pitiful. "Don't be silly," she said. "I'll take care of you, dear. You're my own sister, aren't you?"

NEXT MONTH —

ED LACY's MONKEY ON HIS BACK

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THE GENTLE WAY

by POUL ANDERSON

"It's like this," Arthur Burris said. "If I don't give in, the skunk will marry my daughter."

Trygve Yamamura gained time to think by lighting his pipe. A breeze through an open window flickered the match and brought sounds of Berkeley traffic. Otherwise the private investigator's office was as quiet as it was austere: a Hokusai print on the wall, a Masanobu sword in a glass case, the necessary file cabinets. His desk carried pictures of his Norwegian mother and Hawaiian father, his own wife and children, a pipe rack and tobacco jar.

"What has she to say about it?" he asked after a moment.

Burris twisted the big hands of a one-time laborer together. An expensive suit could not hide his awkward bulk, and somehow made the helplessness on his broad red face all the more touching. "She wants to," he said. "Of course."

"It's a new angle," admitted Yamamura. "I've heard a little about Stanley Withers since he moved out here. A soul like a corkscrew. And a bad record in the east, hasn't he? Can't the police do anything about him?"

"I tried," said Burris. "On the QT. Martha—my daughter—she'd never forgive me if she knew. I hate

to sound like I'm, uh, asking for sympathy, but since my wife died, she's all I've got and—Oh, hell, what could the police do, till Withers gets caught at something illegal?"

"Which might be a long time," said Yamamura. "Racketeers are getting smarter every day. Now they pay their income taxes, and become officers of legitimate organizations. But you've been a little incoherent so far, Mr. Burris. I haven't the faintest idea if I can help you. So let's begin at the beginning, even if we do repeat a few things. You have a road construction company over in Marin County, right?"

Burris' gray head nodded. "It was a little outfit at first," he said. "We specialized in private roads, driveways, and so on. But you know how the population there has boomed since the war."

Yamamura, who liked trees and solitude, nodded with a small grimace.

"My outfit couldn't help expanding," said Burris. "I'm an old bulldozer pilot myself, always got along well with my men, like to do something for 'em; I haven't any son of my own. A few years back I incorporated and gave all employees an option to buy stock. A lot of them have—more and more, as the company got bigger. By the time I retire, they'll control the outfit themselves, between them. I also set up a payroll plan to establish a company benefit fund. It covers items like medical insurance and retirement education for men approaching that age. By now the fund is pretty big."

Yamamura's six-foot frame sank even more loosely into his chair. It was his habit, when sudden understanding opened up before him. "Ah."

"Yeah," said Burris in bitterness. "Till now I've never had any labor troubles. I encouraged the union, back in the old organizing days. And the local was a good one, too, till Hugo Heiss smelled money and moved in on it."

"There'll be a general cleanup, one of these years," said Yamamura.

"Uh-huh. I've watched the signs. But meanwhile, the Heiss mob is in it for what they can get. Including that benefit fund, and as much stock as they can pick up." Burris struck a fist into the other palm, softly, but again and again. "You can see how they go about it, I'm sure. Their stooges among the local's officers and general membership go around yelling that my policies are just a way of undercutting the union. They say the union as a whole ought to have those shares

and take over the fund.

"Well, my men aren't stupid. They've known me for a long time, and they've at least heard about Heiss. A lot of them realize pretty well that if the union, the way it's been infiltrated, if the union did get that treasury, the mob would milk it dry. But you know how people are. Some lazy, some scared, some not interested. After all, it really isn't too much skin off any one individual's nose. Easier to go bowling at night than attend a dull business meeting down in the union hall. Hey?

"The way it works out is, I'm the one who's got to do the fighting. I have to keep reminding the men that this is already their treasury. That if they struck to get direct union control of it, they'd be striking for nobody's benefit but the mob's. I'm the guy who rounds up enough of the boys, each meeting night, and talks 'em into going and voting down Heiss' characters. I'm the one who gets detectives to find out who the mobsters are, and refuses to hire 'em, and helps the other contractors find ways to fire 'em that the union can't openly object to. And, yeah, I'm the one who's goosed the police till they watch over our boys. Or where necessary, I pay for private protection. Poor Bill Channing got his teeth kicked in one night, when he spoke up against the Heiss faction . . . but that was two years ago, and it can't happen that way any more, and Heiss knows it."

The warrior pride faded from Burris' eyes. All at once he was an old man. "So now they're finding other ways to get at me," he finished.

"Your daughter?" said Yamamura gently.

"Yeah. There's another vote coming up in a few months, whether to continue company policy about those shares and that fund, or strike to get it changed. I can lick it, the same way I've been licking it. But they're telling me to lay off, or Martha will suffer. What am I going to do?" pleaded Burris.

"I take it there's no threat to harm her physically," said Yamamura in his driest tone. "Nothing the police could take action about."

"Right," said Burris. "Martha was engaged to a good boy. Not a very romantic fellow, I suppose, but a steady guy I'd be glad to have for a son-in-law. Then Heiss rung in this Withers. He got to know her at some party—oh, they get around these days. It's not like the '30's. Maybe Al Capone was a millionaire then, but you didn't speak to him. . . . Well. She's now engaged to Stanley Withers. All open and aboveboard. Nothing I can say

makes any dent on her mind. She swears she'll marry him. And even before the wedding, she'll leave my house if I say one more word against him."

"Will he, though?" said Yamamura.

"Marry her? Sure he will. I talked to him privately. He laughed in my face and . . . told me exactly what Martha's life with him was going to be like. Do I have to repeat it for you?" Burris bent toward the hands twisting in his lap.

"No," said Yamamura.

"Of course I can't tell her. She wouldn't believe me. She'd run from the house after two words."

"But will she leave him, though?"

"Eventually. She'll have to. Not that he'll do anything she could put him in jail for. He'll only turn the rest of her life into a nightmare, remembering. . . . You've got to help me, Mr. Yamamura, before I go after Withers with a gun!"

"I wouldn't advise that. He'll be readier for it than you are. Maybe he's hoping you will. If he could get you locked up on charges of felonious assault, you've lost everything, including your daughter's affection."

"I wondered—" Burris lifted his eyes again, a blind stare. "You're famous at this judo stuff, aren't you?"

"Judo is a sport," said Yamamura sharply. "I don't hold with violence."

He puffed for a while, his long amber face drawn tight. At last he ran fingers through thinning black hair and said, "Well, I'll do what I can, but frankly, it doesn't look hopeful."

"If you can't fix it up," said Burris, dull-voiced, "I'll kill him. Even if Martha disowns me. They can gas me for it if they want to."

"But if you try to commit murder, and fail—"

"Yeah. I know. God help her. God help her."

Across the bridge from San Francisco, Marin County rises in steep hills. Here grow those yellow poppies which gave the Golden Gate its name; and there are deer between scattered towns, and the enormous silence of Muir Redwoods, and Mount Tamalpais commanding the Bay. The Burris home was down on the shore, though, in Tiburon: one of those pleasant locations where your back yard edges the water on which your sailboat lies.

Yamamura sat in a canvas chair on a sunporch and wondered why Martha Burris wanted to escape so much serenity. Of course, she'd been to an exclusive college and been sent abroad and whatever else

the mute clumsy love of her father could offer. It might have made her a trifle snobbish. She was unfortunate in having most of her looks from him: plain face, dark hair that no shampoo could bring to shine, stocky figure that the best couturier could do little to glamorize.

She said coldly: "I've heard of you. A private eye, is that what they call your sort?"

"On TV," said Yamamura. He wondered if he should have dressed more conservatively. Maybe his usual aloha shirt was making a bad impression; or could it be the green slacks? He smiled. "If you want to call me a professional meddler, Miss Burris, go right ahead. Except that this time I'm not getting paid for it."

Astonished, she sat up straight. For a moment even the nervous tapping of her fingers on her chair arm was stilled. "But I thought my father—"

"What?" asked Yamamura innocently. It was obvious that Martha must never know the old man had engaged him, and he did not consider truthfulness one of the ultimate virtues.

"Oh, nothing." She stared out the glazed wall, toward the sunblink on the inlet.

"May I explain myself?" said Yamamura. "I get around quite a bit, as you can understand, and know a good deal about the more prominent people in this area. Yesterday, by chance, I learned you were going to marry Stan Withers."

He could see the tension go up another notch in her and went on hastily, "I've heard of your father before now, as a fine man." (He had taken the elementary precaution of checking up to make sure Arthur Burris' story was true.) "I couldn't help wondering what his daughter could see in a hood like—"

"I knew it!" She sprang to her feet and stood with fists clenched, shouting at him. "You too! Well, you can just take your gossiping tongue and your nasty little mind back under the rock you came from, and, and, and—"

As her voice broke off, Yamamura said slowly and distinctly, "Rambling rhubarbs are unanatomical, you know."

"*What?*"

"In the uttermost continuity of protocol as defined."

She stared bulging eyed. Yamamura grinned. "Okay, it was a trick. Cooled you off, though, didn't it? So sit down and listen to me for five minutes, because I only want to help you and how could any honorable man be hurt by my mistaken opinion of him?"

"I could be," she said uncertainly.

"You mean, it'd be disloyal to listen to my accusations? Why? Wouldn't it be more loyal to hear me out, and then show me where I'm wrong? Shouldn't you defend your fiancé's reputation, instead of yelling mere denials? Right now, the lady doth protest too much."

She sank back into her chair and fumbled in a purse. Yamamura continued: "You've heard of Hugo Heiss, I trust. Did you know Withers works for him?"

"He does not!" cried Martha. "He works for the union. The local hired Stan as a, a troubleshooter. Public relations and all that. I know there are racketeers in it. But that doesn't make every member a crook!"

"Of course not. In fact, there are only a few bad apples. But Withers is one of them. That 'troubleshooter' folderol isn't even a very good coverup. If he were working at his alleged job, there wouldn't be such a public stink as there is. For that matter, why import a New Yorker for the post? Why not give it to a local man who knows local conditions? No, Withers is a professional gangster in the east. He hasn't changed his ways merely because Heiss got him to come out here and help rob your dad and the union."

"Everybody says these things, but they never prove it! Stan's being smeared, that's all. If you knew how bravely he's taking it—" Martha got a handkerchief from her purse and dabbed at her eyes.

"He has a criminal record," insisted Yamamura.

"I know. He told me all about that. How he grew up in Hell's Kitchen, and fell into bad company, and—It's all over with! Do you have to persecute a man all his life, for mistakes he made when he was a boy? He's been honest for more than ten years!"

"You mean, he's been smart enough to avoid arrest. I checked by phone with a colleague in New York. Stan Withers has been in the waterfront rackets. Two workers who wouldn't go along with that, described the guy who crippled them for live, and it fitted Withers to a hair. Only then their wives were threatened, and both of them retracted their testimony. Believe me, things like that are known for facts, even while the police's hands are tied. . . . And yet, a few months ago, Withers gave up that lucrative post to come here. I checked back and found he stayed at Heiss' home for several days after he arrived, before getting an apartment. Does that sound like a reformed ex-con? But why should he

come here, except that he was offered a lot of money to do a particular job? And what can the job be, except to put pressure on your father through you?"

Martha took forth a cigaret. "I've heard it all before," she said wearily. "Will you please go away, Mr. Yamamura?"

"But if everybody tells you the same thing—"

She flared again: "Should I desert the man I love, just when the going is hard for him?"

Yamamura struck a match for her. "Wasn't there another man?"

"Yes." She sighed, with the tiniest of smiles. "Poor Charlie. I really did hate to cause him pain, breaking our engagement. But he's so drab!"

"I hear he's still carrying a torch for you."

She stared at the cigaret. "Did you light this?" She crushed it out and rose once more. "That will do, Mr. Yamamura. I've had enough of this malice and hurting and—"

He said, with closely estimated cruelty: "But it's all right to hurt your father and your boy friend, anyone who honestly cares for you, is that it?"

Her palm cracked against his face. "Get out!" she screamed through the tears. "Before I call the police!"

Yamamura got.

It wasn't hard to see why Martha Burris had thrown over Charles French when a fine animal like Stanley Withers showed up. French was still in his twenties, but his hairline was receding, eyes blinked behind glasses on a pudgy face above a pudgy body, and he had a trace of a stammer. There was nothing actually defective about him: a good, intelligent young fellow, an accountant with plans for starting his own outfit one day. He simply wasn't exciting. And girls like Martha seldom get a normal amount of excitement in their lives.

He sat on the edge of his bed in the room he had in his mother's house and told Yamamura, "I'd, I'd swap my soul to get her back. It's not the money. Please believe I d-don't want a nickel of her father's money."

"He believes it himself," said Yamamura, "so I guess I do too."

More restless than his own principles approved, he had taken no chair, but lounged against the wall next to a picture of the Colosseum ("I hope someday we can take a trip together, when I get far enough ahead," French had probably assured Martha) and stared out the window. This part of San Francisco was dark at night, gaunt respectable

houses where nothing had happened since they were built right after the fire.

"At least, if I could get her free of that Withers." French sat slumped and beaten. "She doesn't have to marry me. Just so, uh so she doesn't—him, you know."

"What can you tell me about him?" prodded Yamamura.

"Enough. I, well, I asked around. And of course we met quite a few times, when I was still engaged to Martha and he was, was, uh, cultivating her. . . . I had a talk with him, after she decided to marry him. A p-p-private talk. What he said about her—! I even took a swing at him." French smiled ruefully. "Couldn't help myself. Not that I connected. He blocked me and punched back and had me on the floor in five seconds. Kicked me then. Scientifically. Two or three times. Dared me to say a word—of what he'd admitted—or even what he'd done to me—dared me to tell Martha. She wouldn't have b-b-believed me, of course. She'd think I too was persecuting him, and show me the door. She always was strong for the underdog."

"You know Withers is a Heiss man?"

"Sure. And he admitted to me, himself, that time, he'd drop Martha if old Mr. Burris would, uh, stop fighting the, the mob. He'd go away. But if Mr. Burris doesn't stop, soon, Withers'll marry her, and make her life a hell. And knowing what's happening to his daughter—Withers said to me he'd call up the old man once in a while and tell him—how could Mr. Burris keep on fighting effectively?"

"I gather Withers will rather enjoy destroying the girl."

"Oh, yes. Yes. The look on his face, when he told me how he would . . . and then when he was kicking me. . . . It was all he c-c-could do, to stop."

"Surely all the warnings she hears about him must have some influence on Martha. She didn't strike me as hopelessly stupid or neurotic."

"Oh, no. She's uncertain about him, in her heart. So uncertain, I think, that . . . well, it's the reason she refuses to hear another word against him. She doesn't dare risk her illusions. Of course, so far he's been a perfect gentlemen in her presence. And he does have looks, and glamor, and self-assurance, he's physically strong and graceful—" French's mouth twisted wryly upward. "Everything I'm not. And Martha's not. I'm objective enough to see that. Withers isn't pretending to be a, uh, a complete angel, you know. He shows her just enough

sophistication, enough daring little wickednesses—Oh, nothing much, I'm sure. A double date recently, when they went to Tijuana and explored the dives; that sort of thing. But it's new to her. She doesn't think life with him could ever be dull."

"Do you think Burris will give in?" asked Yamamura.

"I'm surprised he's holding out long enough t-t-to call you in on the case, as you say he has. If you don't get rid of Withers soon, yes, the old man will surrender to the mob. And it'll, it'll break his heart. I'd give odds he'll be dead in two years."

"Also, a lot of honest working men will be out of pocket, the national union will get an undeserved black eye, and Heiss will have a good fat sum to defend himself with when the probe finally comes." Yamamura bit his lip.

"You—" French looked up with the tiniest flicker of hope. "I've heard you're a, uh, a judo expert—"

"I've been propositioned before," snapped Yamamura, "and the answer is still no. Violence would solve nothing. As far as Martha is concerned, it'd be just another attack on poor dear Stan, wouldn't it, now? Besides, you have the wrong concept of judo. The word means 'the Gentle Way,' and half the technique consists in yielding, letting the other fellow do what he thinks he wants to do."

"All right," sighed French. "It was only a thought."

"Have you seen Martha lately?"

"No. Not that she's forbidden me the house or anything. She was, uh, very sweet about it all. But I know I'm not welcome there."

"How come? Seems to me like any forgiving has to be done by you."

"That's just it. She hates to hurt anyone, or see them hurt, or—She's the gentlest soul in the world, really. I mean, even her flying into such rages when Withers is spoken ill of . . . isn't that, uh, isn't that her way of shutting off a p-p-painful conflict? Between people, all of whom she likes?" French shrugged.

"So, it's painful to her to see me, because it reminds her that I've been hurt. That I'm still hurting. So I don't go there any longer."

"It might have helped if you'd been more aggressive," said Yamamura.

"Ha! Me play the bold bad cavalier? Maybe if I had a little skill in that judo which you've explained to me isn't any use in this situation—" French stumbled across the room and opened a bureau drawer. "I want a drink. Join me?"

"No, thanks." Yamamura continued to stare out the window.

Suddenly he flopped down on the bed. French turned around with a pint of brandy, doubtless hidden under his shirts so his mother wouldn't know. His round features opened an O of surprise.

Yamamura ignored him, and everything else. Six feet of detective lay on the bed, relaxed as a tiger, for a good five minutes.

At last he shook himself and sat up. French, who had been taking unpracticed sips from the bottle, exploded, "Well?"

"You told me you'd give your soul to get her back." Yamamura spoke low. "Would you undergo some discomfort?"

"What? Why, of course—but—"

"I want you to come around to my dojo for some intensive private sessions. Take a few days off work for the purpose. I'll be there as much as I can, otherwise my assistant will help you."

"What are you . . . what are you talking about?"

"You're to learn some elementary judo," said Yamamura. "I mean *learn* it, get it into your nerves and muscles. You're out of shape and we haven't much time. So don't kid yourself, it'll be rough."

"But you just said—"

"I know. We're not about to put Withers in the hospital." Yamamura scowled. "Maybe we're not about to accomplish anything. This may well go for nothing, you realize. I haven't any plan, only a vague insight. It'll all have to be played by ear. But if things should happen to break for us, I want you prepared. Will you take the chance?"

He liked the way French put the bottle down and said, "Yes."

Withers was tall and sinewy, with excellent taste in sports clothes. His yellow hair was conventionally boyish in a crew cut, and "cold" eyes are a folk tale; only if you looked closely at that handsome face, certain lines about the mouth, might you have guessed what he was. Probably not, though.

The office had been furnished for luxury since he took over, and the desk at which he sat was a gleaming expanse. Everything he had been able to learn assured Yamamura that very little union work went across that desk. He put his briefcase down on it.

"All right," said Withers affably enough. "What can I do for you?"

"My name is Yamamura," said the detective. "I'm here on behalf of Arthur Burris."

Withers stiffened. His lips became ugly. "Burris can see me himself, any time he wants."

"He thought a stranger like me might make a better spokesman,

seeing the issue is a personal one." Yamamura lounged at ease in his own chair, as much because it might unsettle Withers as to conserve energy. The view beyond the desk was of San Rafael, a line of stores and offices cut by the freeway, a remoter glimpse of Marin hills against a deeply blue sky. Hard to imagine how men could waste time cheating their fellow men on a morning like this, when they might be out on a woodland trail . . . but San Quentin wasn't far from here, either.

"Okay, what is it?"

"How much do you want to leave his daughter alone?"

Withers leaned back. The pleasure of mastery tinged his voice. "Oh. That again. He's tried to bribe me before, you know."

"And you refused. That time, you had the fun of telling the old man to his face what you were going to do to Martha once she'd married you: the abuse and degradation you know how to inflict. You told him in detail—Take it easy there," said Yamamura as Withers bristled at him. "I didn't come to fight. It's just a case to me; I'm only an agent."

Withers was still taut. "I don't have to listen to insults," he said.

"All right, forget it. If I told the truth, I apologize. Let me continue, though. There's no pleasure for you in going through that recital again with me, as you did for Burris and French. Martha's not my daughter, nor am I in love with her. Hugo Heiss is paying you a certain sum, whatever it may be, to court the girl and, if necessary, marry her. Well, Burris is willing to top that figure. Name it, and he'll pay more."

Withers grinned. "Ever thought what he might pay from time to time, after I'm married, for me to ease up on my wife?"

"Ah. An added income, eh?" Yamamura kept his temper without effort. He would not have been angry with a rattlesnake either, only crushed its head. Not that he knew if this particular head could be stepped on. "Well, we might make allowances for that, too. Come on, name your price, any price, and see if Burris can meet it."

"What use is money to a dead man?"

"Pardon?"

"What'd Hugo think? He wants control of that fund, and the stock. I'm his tool for getting it. If I don't follow through, how far would I have to run before I was safe?"

"South America? A man with money can have a pleasant life down there."

"I like it here."

"You like it a hundred thousand dollars' worth?"

"Get out," said Withers. "You're wasting my time."

"But look here—"

"Get out, I told you. Or do I have to bounce you out?"

Yamamura sat a little straighter, so that the width of his shoulders became obvious. "Care to try, junior?"

Withers reddened. "See this button?" he answered. "If I press it, four guys will come in who aren't very careful about peoples' noses and teeth. Now, scram."

Yamamura shrugged and rose. "Okay. In case you change your mind, I'm in the Berkeley phone book." He picked up his briefcase and sauntered through the door.

Withers frowned after him, then dismissed the incident and returned to his own work. As a public relations officer, he had an open expense account . . . so, hm, who'd be fun to entertain tonight—?

It was a couple of hours later that his phone rang. He picked it up with an anticipation that faded when a man's rather high voice said, "W-w-withers? This is Charles French."

"Oh. Yeah. What the hell do you want?"

"I have some n-news for you."

There was no mistaking the triumph. French even laughed, however nervously. Withers felt muscles tighten. "So?"

"Your scheme . . . all those, those horrible things you planned for Martha—your courting her just to make her father give way to the racketeers—"

Remembering that a telephone can be bugged, Withers said indignantly, "I've been patient with you, French, but if you keep on repeating those libels I'll have to take legal action."

"Go right ahead," chortled French. "I'd like n-n-nothing better. You see, when Yamamura called on you this morning—"

A pencil broke across in Withers' fingers.

"Didn't you know?" continued French. "Modern tape recorders, transistorized, fit into a briefcase. . . . He guided the conversation, it's all there on tape, your own voice, and, and, and I've got that tape!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," blurted Withers.

"All right. All right. Don't admit anything over the phone. Just listen to m-m-m-me. I've got that tape. Yamamura wanted to, uh, turn it right over to the Burrises. Or the police. Seems like, uh, extortion? Anyhow, the Burrises. But I said no. That's why I'm calling you now. You get a chance."

"If you've made some fake of my voice, you lousy—"

"Listen! Or I'll hang up and go straight to, to them. I don't want to hurt Martha. More than she has to be. If she knew how a cheap crook had, uh, used her against her own father. . . . You just get out of town. Be gone tomorrow and d-don't come back. Send her a letter breaking off the, uh, engagement. Understand? Tomorrow!"

Withers thought at frantic speed. It seemed to him, vaguely, that he had heard of such miniature tape recorders. But they couldn't be very high fidelity, could they? He could deny everything, couldn't he? That damned Yamamura, though, would take oath the recording was genuine. Maybe Martha could be persuaded Yamamura was still another liar. Or maybe not.

And if not, if she jilted Stanley Withers, Hugo Heiss would be very irritated. Hugo Heiss liked his men to get results. Especially when the project had already cost several thousand dollars. Withers' armpits were cold and wet.

But his mind slipped into gear, all the more smoothly because it was afraid.

"Do you have this recording with you?" he asked cautiously.

"I know where it is," French replied.

"Hm. Look, I've got no idea what your game is, but you can't expect me to pack my bags right off. Can you? I mean," said Withers smugly, "give up the girl I love because you've faked some evidence to back all your slanders. If I tell her it's faked, who'll she believe, you or me?"

"W-w-w-want to try?"

"I'm not looking for trouble," said Withers. "Honest. Maybe we can talk this over. Make a gentlemen's agreement, see?"

"In other words, you want money."

"Why, whatever gave you that idea?"

"All right, don't admit anything. Let me only assume: since we can make it tough for you, you'll at least hold us up for a good sum as the price of, uh, surrender."

"I never meant anything of the sort! But don't expect me to say a word you could possibly use against me. I've heard of editing tapes, so an innocent man is framed by his own voice."

"Agreed. I was, uh, expecting something like this. Yamamura and I will meet you—"

"Not Yamamura!" Withers remembered how big and supple his visitor had been. "I won't come near that Jap. After what he did to me, I couldn't trust myself. Let's

you and me talk privately. You're a gentleman, Charlie. We can thresh out our troubles, if nobody else butts in."

French hesitated. At last: "I . . . I won't bring the tape with me, you know. I'll leave it in a safe place."

"That's all right. I only want you and me should talk our problems over."

"You come alone too. None of your strong-arm men."

"Sure. And none of your damn recorders, either!"

"Shall we say . . . do you know that picnic spot, about halfway up Tamalpais? It'll be deserted, mid-afternoon of a, uh, a week day." Withers admitted he had never been there, and French gave him careful directions. "Three o'clock, then. And alone! If I see anybody with you, I'll drive straight past."

"Suspicious little guy, aren't you?" snorted Withers. "Okay, three o'clock."

He hung up and sat staring out the window. At last his mouth grew firm. If he had to play this rough, he had to.

Certainly Charlie-boy had walked straight into it, both near-sighted eyes wide open. Gloatingly sure he had the trump card and Withers would decamp for a price. Soft in head, soft in body. He shouldn't be much of a problem.

In fact, it would be kind of fun. A lot of fun, if Charlie-boy got stubborn. Withers lit a cigaret, took a long drag, and smiled all around it.

There was a parking place, from which the mountainside toppled in huge vistas of summer-brown grass and deep dales, toward the remote metal sheet of the Bay. As he pulled up close to the other, waiting automobile, French realized exactly how isolated he was.

He tried to wet his lips, but his tongue felt like a block of wood. His heart was noisy in his ears. That wouldn't do. Relax, Yamamura had said, always relax, it is the first and last precept of the Gentle Way. French compelled his breath to slow down and directed one part of his body after another to stop tensing itself. It didn't work any too well, he'd only had a few days of instruction in Berkeley, but it helped.

Withers gibed from the open convertible where he sat: "You're late. It's a quarter past. Were you scared, sonny?"

"I-i-it was one way to make sure . . . you'd be here . . . when I arrived . . . at, uh, at this moment." French stepped out.

Withers turned an angry retort into sardonicism: "Well, can

you see I haven't got any goons crouched on the floor?" He joined the other man.

Here goes, thought French; and then he remembered that was the wrong psychology. A judoka doesn't anticipate, for him there are no thresholds, all existence is a oneness.

"Well?" he said. It sounded like another person's voice, far off.

"Not right here. Over there." Withers jerked a thumb at the flat acre across the highway, beneath the next upward loom of the mountain. It was densely screened by eucalyptus. Picnic tables could be glimpsed beyond the tall ragged-barked trees; but for all practical purposes, anyone there would be hidden from passing motorists.

"How come?" French made his jaws unstiffen. "Are you afraid I've got a tape recorder in, uh, under my d-d-dashboard?"

"You want to talk confidentially, or don't you?" said Withers. He led the way. Silvery boles closed around them; long leaves made pungent an air gone hot and quiet.

So quiet.

Withers stopped near one of the rustic tables, folded his arms, and faced French across a couple of yards of space. "Well, Charlie-boy," he said. "Getting clever, aren't we?"

"M-m-m-maybe." Relax, you idiot, relax, French groaned at himself.

"You really think I'd run from a lousy tape?" said Withers. "I thought you had *some* brains under all that fat."

"It . . . it p-proves—"

"Proves nothing. Not a damn thing. Is that Jap an officer of the law? Are you? The very worst that could happen, if you trotted it out, I'd have to say he brought up all those tired old slanders about me, and I humored him so as to find out what his game was."

"Would Martha really b-b-believe that?"

"She's stupid enough." Withers spat.

The flick of anger was curiously steadying. French found his words under close control: "If you want to put it to the test, do so. We'll play our tape for her and see how she reacts. She may have been a little foolish, through sheer inexperience of vermin like you, but she's intelligent."

"Watch your language, chum." Withers took a step forward. His mouth stretched wide and thin.

"Why should I? You're the one who wanted this conference. Go ahead, say whatever you came here to say."

"I will, then. Give me that tape. That's what I came here to say."

French actually managed a chuckle. "You claim it can't harm you. So what do you care?"

"It might work. It'd make a lot of trouble for me, anyhow. Trouble I don't want. Where is that tape, piggie?"

"Not here!"

"But you can get it. I want that tape."

"Goodbye."

"Not so fast!" Withers bounded quickly into French's path. He laughed, a touch feverishly. "I went to a lot of trouble to get you up here alone. Quick thinking, wasn't it? Now that I've got you, I've got ways to make you give me that tape. You'll go very meek with me and get it. Right now, or in half an hour. Only after half an hour, you wouldn't be walking so good. So why not give it to me right away?"

Out of a great descending peace, French said, "You mean to use violence? Go ahead. Try it. I'll prefer charges."

"I didn't bring anybody with me," Withers answered, "but I did arrange half a dozen witnesses. They'll swear I've been playing poker with them all afternoon."

"But—"

"I can drive your car off that bluff. You had an accident, see? That's what marked you up so bad. If you don't say you had an accident—well, I got my witnesses, and you'll have been real glad to give me the tape. Anything you say about me having beat you up, Charlie-boy, would be just another lie. I might even sue. . . . I'd kind of enjoy half an hour right now, arguing with you," said Withers dreamily. "Better not get me started. You want to have kids some day, don't you? Maybe Martha'll come back to you, after she's been with me a while."

He stepped closer. French snatched an automatic from his inside coat pocket. "I . . . I thought this might happen," he said. "Stay where you are!"

Withers was hardly disconcerted. "Well, well. *I* know better than to lug one of those around. Gimme it before you hurt yourself, sonny."

"Stop!" whispered French. Sweat trickled into his eyes. It stung. "Halt. Or so help me, I'll shoot."

"A .45 is one of the toughest weapons there is to use," Withers told him. "Unless a man's got experience with it, anybody can take it away. Go ahead, shoot. You got point-blank range. I'll bet you miss by a yard."

The muzzle wobbled through an arc. "I swear I'll shoot!"

Withers closed in with one smooth, incredibly swift stride. His left arm batted out, striking the

barrel aside. His right fist hit the solar plexus. French grunted in anguish and let go. Withers tossed the pistol in the air. Sunlight streamed through unstirring leaves to shine blue on the metal. Withers caught it as it fell and dropped it into his own hip pocket.

"I better take care of this," he said. His face was wet, but with an excitement other than fear. "Well, Charlie, this is your last chance. Do I get that tape without any more argument?"

French stopped rubbing his belly long enough to shout, "No!"

"Any time you're ready to quit, say so." Withers' foot flashed toward the groin.

French, already falling, took the kick on a shoulder. The pain was like lightning. He rolled over on the ground, exposing his less vulnerable back to the next blow. Relax, relax, he told himself, pretend it's a tooth being pulled, or the surgery needful to cut out a cancer, relax and go away from your body for a while.

He couldn't manage it, quite. But most of the kicks took him in well-padded sections, and most of their energy went to moving his total weight rather than damaging rigid muscles.

"Aarh!" Withers snarled. "Up you go!" He bent over to haul French erect. French got a grip on him and pulled him down. Withers broke free with skill, taking the opportunity to put his fist back in the other man's stomach, and hauled him half to his feet. French struggled, but Withers got behind him, fastened on an arm lock, and dragged him toward a table.

He threw French down across it. The edge bit into French's back. He cried aloud. "You ready to quit?" Withers asked. French didn't answer. "Good," grunted Withers, and hit him in the mouth. He fended off French's unstrong arms, took a handful of hair, and beat French's head against the tabletop.

Someone screamed.

Withers looked around. Through a blue, and a roaring and pulsing, French saw Martha enter the grove.

Yamamura slammed his Volkswagen to a halt beside the girl's parked car. She was passing into the trees across the highway and didn't notice. He tore open the door and vaulted out.

As he burst in behind her, he was pleased that her shriek was, *"Charlie!"*

Withers saw the tall figure in the flamboyant shirt, an instant after he became aware of Martha. "You!" he bellowed, with an obscenity. Yamamura ran to meet him, but

stopped several feet short of collision and waited.

Withers plunged swinging at the detective. Yamamura made a sideward motion, stooped, caught the attacker, and used all that momentum to boost Withers over his shoulder. The movement continued with an assist from two big hands. Withers flew in an arc and landed with an earthquake thump.

He was tough, bounded up again and rushed in anew. Yamamura saw three easy ways to put him out of action—not to mention some possibly fatal karate blows. But he elected a simple *randori*, which put the opponent on his back, hard. An accumulation of smaller defeats would subdue Withers more than a single knockout.

From the corner of an eye, Yamamura watched Martha kneel down by French. The boy didn't look in too bad a shape. Bruised, cut lip, broken glasses, might need a stitch or so and a few days in bed; but he'd learned his judo lessons well. Not offensive tactics, there hadn't been time for that, but defense. Simply knowing how to fall without hurting yourself makes a big difference.

"Are you all right, Charlie? Oh, God, what was he doing to you?" The breath rattled in Martha's throat. "What happened?"

"I . . . I'd phoned you, you know," mumbled French. "Asked you to meet me here at half past three . . . where we used to meet —" As Withers hit the ground once more, French caught Yamamura's gaze. Martha's face was buried on French's breast. The young man had one black eye, but the other closed in a slow triumphant wink at Yamamura.

"Yes, yes, yes," wept the girl. "But why?"

"I wanted to . . . to say goodbye. One last time together . . . to say I love you . . . before I go away from here—" (*Helledusse!* thought Yamamura, how corny can you get? But Martha was lapping it up.)

"You're not going anywhere!" exclaimed Martha. "To bed is all! And — and — *Him!*" she gasped. "What was he doing to you?"

French wiped blood from his nose. "He . . . must have . . . followed me up here. He thought I . . . I don't know what. He told me to lay off you. He said such vile things about you—I said I couldn't leave you to him. He said he'd force me to. Then we started . . . I don't know . . . I guess he hit me—"

"Oh, Charlie, Charlie, my darling!"

Suddenly remembering Withers, Martha turned her face around with

a squeak of terror. She was just in time to see him collapse under the scientific impact of the edge of a hand. Yamamura bent over and extracted the automatic from his pants.

"So he's been lugging hardware too," remarked the detective. "A real killer type. I'd better take charge of this." He slipped it into his own belt. No use explaining to Martha that the gun had been Yamamura's in the first place, and wasn't loaded in the second place. It would spoil the fine effect as much as any talk would of a tape recording which had never existed.

Not breathing very hard, he went over to the others and interrupted an embrace. "Excuse me," he said, "I'd better have a look at those injuries." A few questions and tests reassured him. "Mr. French is okay, Miss Burris. But it's lucky we arrived when we did."

A certain suspicion touched her eyes. "Mr. Yamamura! How did you happen to be here?"

He shrugged. "Bawl me out if you like, but I took it on myself to follow you around. You should never have been alone with a bad actor like Withers."

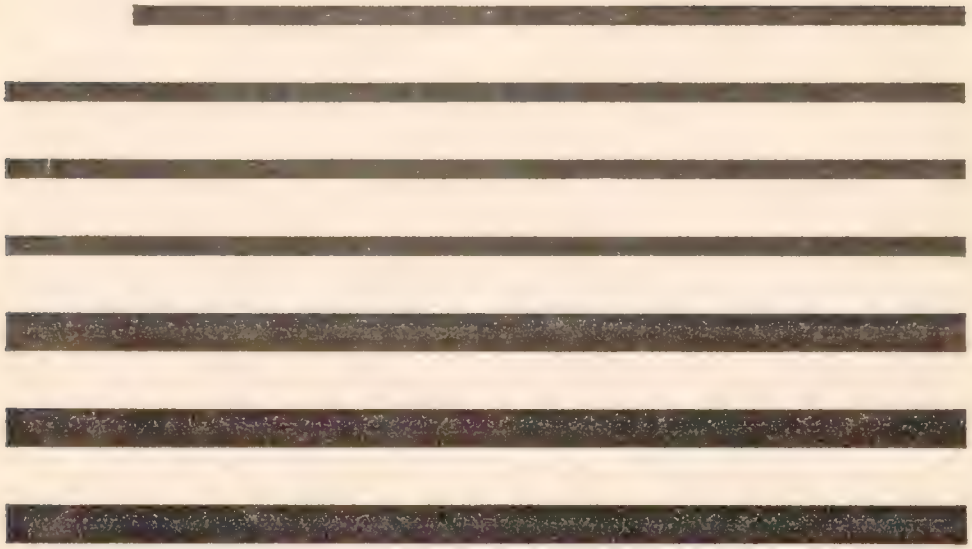
"I know that, now," she agreed humbly.

"Well, suppose I put Mr. French into your car and you drive him home. I'll take Withers to the sheriff's office." Yamamura glanced at the gangster's inert shape, estimated it would stay inert for another ten minutes, and helped French rise. "Incidentally, I know you don't want all this affair to get into the papers. But don't worry. The D.A. will protect your reputation, Miss Burris, and the defense attorney will be only too glad not to bring more details than he can help into the trial testimony."

Martha shuddered. "But then he —that creature there—he might go free!"

"Oh, no," said Yamamura. "He'll go up for assault and battery, that's certain. And he being an official of the union, it'll attract public attention to what's been happening. Might even bring on that long overdue probe and cleanup. Withers will be in jail for a year or two. But you needn't feel sorry for him." Yamamura grinned, like a large lean Cheshire cat. "When he gets out, his good friend Hugo Heiss will have a welcome all prepared."

dear little sister



by C. B. GILFORD

Skipper was elated when the baby first came. He'd been an only child for seven years, and the Jamisons lived on the very edge of their small town where there were few children, and none at all his own age. So he'd been a lonely little boy, and the information that there was suddenly a new creature in the family who might become a companion and playmate pleased him.

"You've got a little sister, Skipper," George Jamison told his son.

"Gee, that's swell," Skipper said.

Mr. Jamison went on to explain just what "a little sister" was, and what might be expected from her in the near future. "But even while she's just a baby, you'll enjoy her," he added. "Babies are very interesting."

And for the first year or so, Skipper found the newcomer to be just that—interesting. Eternally, inexhaustibly interesting. He could sit for hours and watch little Nanette's antics, first in the crib, then in the playpen, and finally when she began to toddle around the floor.

He didn't seem to be aware in the beginning that little Nanette was his rival. The fact that his father and mother paid more attention to the baby than to him, that they kissed and hugged the baby more than they did him, all seemed natural

enough. They found little Nanette interesting too. Perhaps he even found pleasure in imitating them. He took the same attitude toward the baby that they did, played with her in the same way, talked to her with the same silly little baby-talk. It all made him feel rather grown up.

Even through Nanette's second year he was still not disillusioned. Possibly he found her a little less amusing as she began to abandon her baby ways. And he was probably unaware that while his own affection for her waned slightly, imperceptibly, in the same gradual ratio his parents' affection was actually increasing. Because he still did feel affection.

In fact, when Nanette was two and a half, he was quite horribly disturbed by a piece he came across and managed to read in a newspaper. The story concerned the Pollard family who lived over in Greenfield. Little Sandra Pollard, aged three, had crawled into an old, discarded refrigerator, had let the door slam shut after her, and had suffocated to death.

But perhaps what disturbed Skipper about the story was not only the horror of it, but also the remarkable fact that the Pollard family seemed so similar to his own family. There was a father and a mother. Sandra Pollard had been just a few months older than his own Nanette. And Billy Pollard was just a year older than himself.

And now poor Billy was alone, an only child. Somehow Skipper felt a great sympathy for this boy who was just a name to him. He reflected upon his own situation, and tried to imagine how he would react if something happened to Nanette. He didn't understand too much about death or the phenomenon of being dead, but he did know that the dead person had to be buried in the ground and never returned. That must not happen to little Nanette. Something would be missing from his life and awfully wrong if she were dead and never came back. And that must be the way Billy Pollard was feeling.

Eventually he became so utterly disturbed over the incident that he wrote Billy Pollard a letter of sympathy. Skipper Jamison was not quite ten yet, but he was a bright boy in school, and therefore both his reading and writing abilities were somewhat advanced.

"Dear Billy Pollard," he wrote. "I read about what happened to your sweet little sister Sandra and I am very sorry. If you are lonesome write me a letter and I will answer you. Skipper Jamison."

Billy Pollard did write back, and

an irregular correspondence was started. They never saw each other, but they became fast friends. This friendship filled up some of the emptiness left in Skipper's young life when little Nanette began to crowd him further and further out of his parents' attention and affection . . .

. . . By her fourth birthday Nanette was already something of a small shrew. Probably not malicious though. Just spoiled.

Of course Skipper observed no connection between that spoiling and his parents' conversation which he overheard. "The doctor says definitely that I can never have any more children," Harriet Jamison said to her husband. Her voice sounded funny, different.

"That doesn't make you happy, does it?" George Jamison asked.

"Happy? You know better than that, George. You know very well I want more children as badly as you do."

"I know, Harriet. I'm sorry. We both want a big family . . ."

Skipper could hardly have disagreed with them more. If Nanette alone had wrought such destruction in his life, a few more like her would have made his existence unbearable.

But he remembered the conversation, and it provided some comfort. There would be no more little monsters entering the house disguised as sweet, helpless babies. Nanette would be the only one forever.

Of course for the moment at least, Nanette was sufficient. The list of her sins in Skipper's mind was as long as his memory, and she seemed to add new offenses every day.

There was little doubt, for instance, who was the Jamisons' favorite child when it came to getting presents. On birthdays, Christmas, Easter, or whatever. Even on Sqipper's own eleventh birthday . . . and that was a horrible blow, not even having his own birthday any more.

He had just finished opening his several little wrapped packages. The gifts were simple enough though ordinarily he would have much appreciated them—a cheap baseball mitt, a little book of adventure stories, a small model airplane kit. But at the sight of Skipper's receiving these treasures, little Nanette let out a howl.

"I knew she'd be jealous," Harriet Jamison told her husband quickly. "She just doesn't understand that there are some times when only one person receives presents. But I'm prepared for her."

At that point Mrs. Jamison scur-

ried out of the room, and then in a few seconds she was back with a gaily wrapped package. To be sure it was only one package, but it was bigger than all of Skipper's packages put together.

Given the peace-offering, little Nanette silenced her howling and commenced to tear away at the colored paper. What emerged finally was a doll not too much smaller than Nanette herself, and with blue eyes and golden hair just exactly like hers.

Now it wasn't that Skipper envied Nanette possession of that doll. But at eleven he was beginning to realize somewhat the importance of money, and to appreciate the relative values of different things in terms of that money. And he knew very well, without having to think twice about it, that the doll had cost easily twice as much as his mitt, his book, and his airplane, all added up.

His eleventh birthday was ruined.

There were a million other things though. That birthday wasn't the beginning, nor was it the end. Nanette was stealing all of her parents attention too. Skipper never got helped with his homework any more. His father was always reading to Nanette. If he ever got taken anywhere—like to a movie, for instance—it was only because Nanette wanted to be taken, and he, Skipper, was still a little too young to be left home alone.

One of the worst things was the habit Mrs. Jamison got into, of thinking of Skipper not as a boy with his own interests and occupations, but rather as a servant and nursemaid to little Nanette.

"Take your little sister out to the park with you," Harriet Jamison would say. "Swing her in the swings for awhile."

"But, Mom," he'd answer, "I want to watch the high school boys playing baseball."

"Nonsense," his mother always replied. "What's more important, baseball or your dear little sister?"

But she—his mother, that is—gave him the unkindest cut of all that day when his veracity, his trustworthiness, his character, his whole value as a human being was weighed in the balance against Nanette and was found wanting.

The item concerned was a vase. Just a vase to Skipper, but it had always seemed to have some special value to his mother. She kept it on the mantel right in the center of it, in the living room, a huge, squat reddish thing, that she always put flowers into. It had sat in that one spot all of Skipper's life. He had been told not to touch it, and he never had.

Little Nanette owned a rubber ball, a rather large one, six or seven inches in diameter. Although she'd been told not to, she often played with the ball in the house. Being a spoiled child, she wasn't terribly obedient.

On that particular day Skipper was in the living room too. He sat and watched his little sister playing with the ball, feeling a kind of horror, a sense of impending doom, as she threw the ball against the fireplace so that it would bounce back to her. He considered cautioning her about the vase, but desisted because he realized she would pay little heed to his advice.

It was inevitable, in the hands of a four-year-old child, that the ball would sometime go astray. When the inevitable finally happened, the ball struck the vase a glancing blow. For a long dreadful moment, the thing spun and wobbled on its base, teetered to the edge of the mantel, then toppled over and fell to the tiles below, where it smashed and broke with a loud noise.

Nanette and Skipper stared at each other. Both were terrified, Skipper at the thought of what his mother would say, Nanette in a dimmer, more primitive, more selfish way. But it was the little girl who reacted first.

"Mama," she screamed as she ran toward the kitchen, "Skipper broke your vase!"

The scene that followed would be etched on Skipper's memory forever. His mother entering the living room, viewing the devastation, then turning revengefully toward him. Her anger and her accusation, that he denied in a choking, guilty-sounding voice. Even his desperate denunciation of Nanette, and his mother's even greater rage at his trying to push the blame off on his innocent little sister. She didn't believe him at all. Not for one instant did it even occur to her to believe him.

That was by far the worst part of it, and the mere punishment he received later was anti-climactical. The whipping his father gave him, the confinement in his room for a whole sunny, summer week—these chastisements fell on an unfeeling body inhabited by a shattered soul.

His hurt was so deep that he had to share it with somebody. So he wrote a long, long letter to Billy Pollard, to whom he poured out his woe and his agony.

"Dear Billy," he wrote, "I hate my little sister so much that I think I would like to kill her . . ."

. . . The availability of the refrigerator was something of a coincidence, yet not entirely so. Skipper

had been aware of its future promise—though perhaps only vaguely, subconsciously. It was an old machine, older than Skipper himself. In its later years it began to require the services of a repair man with increasing frequency. Skipper would watch that man when he came to the house and spread out his tools on the kitchen floor. He was attracted to the scene in a kind of mystic way, aware somehow that there an important part of his destiny was being shaped. He watched the repair man's probing of the machine's innards as an old superstitious Greek might have watched an oracle or a seer disembowel an animal and search its entrails for the signs of fate.

So it was that the boy felt a strange inner excitement that day when the repair man announced portentously, "Mrs. Jamison, I'm afraid this old box just isn't worth fixing any more."

His excitement mounted that evening when his mother and father discussed the problem. And he was momentarily appalled at his father's suggestion, "But, Harriet, wouldn't the store allow us something on a trade-in?"

"Ten dollars," his mother said. "I think we could do better ordering through the catalogue without a trade-in."

Skipper breathed more easily at that. He realized now that Fortune, which had prepared so thoroughly for this conclusion, would not be thwarted in this final moment.

Harriet Jamison was showing the catalogue to her husband. "Of course," she said, "I don't know what we'll do with the old refrigerator."

"We can put it out in the garage," George Jamison answered with inspiration. "Maybe when a junk man comes along, we could get five or ten dollars for it."

Since the Jamisons were in moderate circumstances, the economic argument carried the day. A week later a gleaming new refrigerator arrived in the kitchen, and the faithful old servant was consigned to the dustiest corner of the garage.

The Fates had decreed. The oracle had spoken. Destiny beckoned. It remained only for Skipper Jamison to follow the prescribed path.

But he waited with professional calm until the proper moment. That moment, he knew quite well, would occur on a Wednesday. That was his mother's shopping day. He had to return from school promptly every Wednesday, so that he could be at home to take care of Nanette for a couple of hours while his mother went to the store.

Because Nanette was in a phase

where she didn't like going to the store with her mother.

And he was careful in his plans too. First he made sure that the old refrigerator door still preserved its original balance, that if left swinging, it would swing shut. When he discovered that the door would not function quite properly he pushed and tugged and maneuvered the refrigerator till the balance was restored.

He was just as careful in his strategy of dealing with his victim. There must be, he realized, no struggle. He could not force Nanette into the refrigerator. She could scream very loud, so someone might hear her if she screamed while he pushed her into the refrigerator. Of if not, someone later might notice the evidence of a fight, a scratch or a torn dress or something. No, he hadn't the slightest intention of ever being punished for deliberately killing her. He'd be punished enough probably for carelessness and allowing the accident to occur.

When he devised his game of hide-and-seek, he was well aware that it might not work on the first try. But he had suffered for a long time, and he could afford to be a little patient now. Just as long as his plan matured before some junk man would arrive to claim that refrigerator.

On the first Wednesday afternoon, it was difficult even to interest Nanette in his game. He found that it required the most subtle suggestion. The little girl had an automatic hostility toward anything her big brother might tell her to do. So on that first Wednesday they didn't play the game at all. He sat and watched her stoically as she spent all that precious time in cutting paper dolls.

On the second Wednesday his luck was better. Nanette was in an especially restless mood, dissatisfied with all her customary recreations. It was she who suggested hide-and-seek, possibly forgetting that Skipper had planted the seed in her mind the week before. Skipper agreed to the game reluctantly. He had figured out that Nanette would probably prefer that he amuse her against his will.

That day she hid in all the most obvious places. She didn't go near the old refrigerator. But there was progress. She learned the spirit of the game, the fact that it was a competition demanding skill from both the hider and the seeker. She squealed with delight on those occasions when Skipper pretended to be unable to find her, and then grudgingly complimented her on the cleverness of her hiding place.

So it was only a matter of time

really. The number of hiding places on the Jamison property and even in the surrounding neighborhood was limited. The possibilities narrowed down remorselessly. The game and the pleasure of outwitting her brother drove Nanette to extremes of ingenuity. She could not avoid the trap for long.

It was on the fourth Wednesday that Skipper finally began to sense triumph. He had discovered Nanette easily on her first two attempts to hide from him. The failures made her peevish and desperate. On the third time around he checked all the usual places without finding her in any of them.

Despite his excitement, he was still cautious. He double-checked to make sure. Finally, having eliminated all other potential locations, he went to the garage and peered inside. The refrigerator sat there as it had for past several weeks, abandoned, its door closed.

He walked into the garage and stood in front of the refrigerator, staring at it with fascination. He did not know how long it would take for a person to breathe all the air inside the box. But he was certain the air would be used up before his mother returned. The only thing he had to be certain of was that Nanette was inside.

He waited. He knew that she would be patient, thinking he was searching for her. But it wouldn't be too long before she realized that he hadn't found her and it was therefore time to emerge and proclaim her victory. Then she would discover that she couldn't escape and would become frightened. He didn't know how much noise she'd be able to make in there. He'd have to stand guard and see, take whatever measures were necessary.

A time of silence passed. He found himself already savoring the fruits of victory. There would be a period, of course, during which his parents would miss Nanette. But he'd also heard that nobody ever remembers dead people forever. So even his father and mother would begin to forget. Then they would turn to him, their only surviving child, and besides they'd already said they couldn't have any more children. He'd be very important to them, more important than he'd been before Nanette came. Things would be nicer than ever. All he had to do was to be patient, as he was being now.

In the midst of his happy cogitations he heard what he had expected to hear. A small pounding noise, which seemed to come from inside the refrigerator. He put his ear against the outside to make sure. He hadn't been wrong. And to-

gether with the pounding, he thought he heard her calling too, "Skipper . . . Skipper . . ."

He straightened up and smiled. But there were things yet to do. The pounding was getting a little louder, and he didn't know how far away it could be heard. He walked quickly out of the garage and shut the door behind him. Then he stood for another moment and listened. The sound wasn't nearly as loud with the garage door shut. He sauntered away, covering even that small sound with his whistling.

He stood out in the front yard for a while. Mr. Simmons, the next door neighbor, approached from down the block.

"Hi there, Skipper," Mr. Simmons said.

"Hello, Mr. Simmons," Skipper said.

"How come you're not out in the park watching the ball game?"

"I have to stay here with Nanette."

"Baby-sitting, huh? Too bad. Where is she, by the way?"

"We're playing a game. She's hiding from me. Pretty soon I'll have to go and look for her."

"I see. Well, have a good time."

Mr. Simmons walked away. A minute or so later, Skipper realized that Mr. Simmons might be looking out a window and might see him still standing there. So he went around to the back yard again and went through the motion of hunting for Nanette. But he didn't go near the garage.

A few minutes later an added touch of authenticity occurred to him. He commenced shouting in a loud voice, "Nanette! Nanette! You can come home free!"

He did that for quite a long time. Mr. Simmons finally leaned out of a window and wanted to know what the trouble was. Skipper told him.

Mr. Simmons came out of his house then and joined in the search. One of the first places they went to was the garage. Skipper mentioned that he'd already searched there.

"Did you look inside that old ice box?" Mr. Simmons wanted to know.

"No, sir," Skipper admitted.

Well, Mr. Simmons did look. It was he, therefore, who found Nanette. He was very excited. He tried to wake her up, and when that didn't work, he telephoned for a doctor.

Mr. Simmons hadn't dared to say it. He left that up to the doctor. The doctor said that Nanette was dead . . .

". . . Dear Billy," Skipper wrote to his friend. "Everything has been real swell around this house lately.

My father and mother are real good to me now, because they don't want me to feel bad. My mother brings me a present every time she goes to the store, and my father goes with me to watch the high school team play baseball. They are so nice to me that I don't blame them any more for the way they used to treat me. I'm glad I killed Nanette like you killed Sandra. It was real easy. Thanks for telling me how. I'm going to tell other boys too if I see they're having little sister trouble, and maybe get them to join our club too. So please send me my special secret badge . . . Your old pal, Skipper . . ."

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you just can't kill a skinny girl

by **ALEX AUSTIN**

The trouble with trying to murder a fashion model is that she looks dead before you kill her.

Harry Pinto liked that one. Going up in the elevator now, he grinned and nodded as he always did whenever a good joke idea came to mind. Too bad I won't be able to use it on my show, he thought. He could do a whole routine about fashion models. Plenty of gag stuff handy.

Harry Pinto was a comic. He was the loud, wise-cracking sort of comic who had been brought up in burlesque, had flopped in pictures, and now was good for two or three seasons on TV.

Tonight Harry was on his way to the apartment of Susie Giles. He and Susie had been a thing in the columns and with the yak boys at Lindy's for close to six months now. Harry had known a lot of good looking girls in his day—strippers, singers, an actress or two, some of the chorus bunch, the towering show girls who'd laugh at anything you said even if you were only reciting a page out of the Brooklyn phone book—but he had never known one with the kind of class Susie Giles had and so Harry had done something he had never thought himself capable of—he had really and truly

and deeply fallen for Susie. He had tried to kid himself out of it in the beginning. He told himself all the stock stories about fat middle-aged men who let the young dollies kiss their bald heads for them. He knew hundreds of great stories like this, but now suddenly none of them were very funny. It was gag stuff, he told himself, nothing for a serious line and yet that was just what he was giving it—the very very serious line.

The switch for Harry had been that Miss Susie Giles had turned out to be the comic between them because she had laughed it up big when he had told her how he loved her, how he wanted to marry her. Susie just sat there, smiling first as if she had heard the punch line but was going to let him tell the story anyway. And then she had started to laugh until the tears rolled down her long, pale, boney face and Harry sat there, puffing on his cigar, trying to smile first, trying to let it be a joke if that's what she thought it was, because Harry lived for the laughs he could get. But it just wouldn't turn funny for him and he told her so. He told her again he wanted to marry her.

Susie said, "I'm afraid you've got everything wrong, Harry dear."

"What's wrong, baby?" he asked her.

And Susie said, "Just because we've been 'makin' the scene' as you keep saying—that doesn't exactly mean I love you."

Harry nodded and said, "Yeah, yeah. I know. I'm a funny guy. Dames don't love funny guys. We're good for laughs, ya know?" He grinned. He crushed the cigar out hurriedly in the blue ceramic ash tray. "Still, I figured how we've been makin' it real fine for six months now, ya know, maybe we'd be good for a couple of years. Lot of laughs. My contract runs for two more years, so we'll have plenty for kicks at least that long."

"You talk about marriage as if it were just another show," Susie said.

"Look now," Harry said, his fat small hands out in front of him as he spoke, moving with the rhythms of his speech. "I love you, baby. Maybe I talk funny. Maybe I don't know the nice pretty words you know? Maybe I shoulda had my writers do me a bit for this, huh?" He grinned, but the grin went all sour on his lips when he saw that his remark had not reached her. "I'll give you anything you want," he said. "Just name it. I'll lay off the drink if that's what's botherin' you. You keep talkin' about Paris. O.K. Right after my last show, we hop over. How's that, huh?"

Susie smiled and shook her head.

"You just wouldn't understand, I'm afraid," she said.

"Yeah, yeah—O.K. Just try me. Maybe I'm good for more than the two buck question."

"Harry. . . ."

"Hell, I go to the movies all the time," he said. 'I know what this love stuff's about."

"I've already told you what it is," Susie said. "I don't love you. It's that simple. When I get married, I'm afraid I want to be very much in love."

Harry nodded knowingly. "Dream stuff," he muttered. "Yeah, I know."

"It's what most people get married for, Harry," she told him.

"Yeah. I read it in the papers all the time," he said.

Susie did not answer him. She sat there now, somehow sadly elegant as she watched him, her body making sharp, perfect lines in the blue dressing gown she had on. Her auburn hair was swept up on top of her head, not a strand out of place.

Harry grinned again and shifted about nervously on the sofa. He glanced around the room. It was so damned sleek, he thought. All grey and white. It was a room where nothing was ever spilled, where no one ever put a foot up on a chair or table, where not even the dust could reach through the grey and gold drapes. It looked more like an ad in a magazine than a real room. He tried to pick out all the details of the room to focus his attention on them one by one, but this did not work.

"We've had kicks," he said in a quiet voice.

"Of course, we've had kicks, Harry," she said, her voice trying to be gentle with him. "I've had marvelous times with you, times I wouldn't give up for anything in the world. But that doesn't mean I want to marry you."

"I'm a little too stubby for that huh?" He turned on her. There was anger now in his small eyes, closing them down so that they were partially lost amid rolls of pink fat. His face seemed to have become much older when the laughter was gone out of it. There was a dilapidated look about his mouth, the lips heavy around the wet end of the fresh cigar he had taken out.

Susie turned away. She walked slowly, gracefully to the long walnut bar in the corner of the room and poured herself a brandy. "Want a drink?" she asked him, watching him in the mirror that was behind the bar.

"I asked you a question," Harry said.

"You don't have to talk like that. We're not fighting . . ."

"I'll talk any damn way. . . ." He shook his head and muttered, "O.K. Forget it. You get yourself a new sponsor. I'll get myself a new show."

He got up and started towards the door.

"Harry, come back here . . ."

"That's all the script I've got," he said.

"Harry. . . ."

He had just taken it so completely for granted that she would jump at the chance of marrying Harry Pinto —big-time comic. People buy automobiles because I make them laugh, he thought. But for some fancy clothes horse I'm not good enough.

The elevator stopped, the doors opened slowly. Harry stepped out onto the thick black carpet he had told her once had been designed especially for flat-footed drunks.

He felt in his pocket for the revolver. As his fingers touched the warm metal, the realization struck him with its full impact for the first time that he was actually going to murder her. With this gun, he would put an end to this life that could have made him the happiest man alive. The idea flashed across his mind that perhaps it was all only part of a long joke and as soon as he stepped in the door, somebody would say the punch line and that would be the end of it. They would sit down together on the floor and just laugh and laugh until the tears rolled down their cheeks.

But it was no joke.

He started slowly down the silent hallway towards her door. He wondered why the hallway was always this quiet. You never heard a single sound. In his own apartment building there were always radios blasting or parties going on. Any night you had nothing going for you in his house, you could first go walking through the halls until you heard a party going and then you walked in. But here, it seemed as if the entire house was inhabited by dead people. There wasn't a sound.

He stopped before the door. He stood there for several minutes, letting the whole thing race back and forth through his mind in blurred crazy images that no longer made any sense to him. Everything that had happened between them now seemed to be part of some other life he had lived—almost like a show he had played in once and now he could not quite remember the lines that he had said then six nights a week and on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons for maybe a year.

It was ridiculous to get this worked up over any lousy broad in the whole world. He told himself this, but it didn't make one bit of

difference. All his life he knew he was the stubby guy with the fat nose and the voice like gravel and so he had played it for laughs and it had worked just fine. What he couldn't find in a broad, he could find in a bottle and it worked the other way around, until now he had found both the bottle and the broad packaged up nice and neat together and even more than that. He had felt things inside him he had never even knew existed, things he had not even guessed when he would watch all the pretty boys and girls on the big wide screen go through their motions that were supposed to tell everyone else in their eighty cent seats just what love was all about. She had made him feel things he could not stand feeling without her and so he had to put a stop to them or else he was sure they would put a stop to him.

Just imagine, he told himself, you, the big big funny man, everything nothing but a yak, and you're standing here like some school kid who never saw a curve ball in his whole life.

He started to reach for the bell, but he changed his mind. He took out his own key and very quietly he opened the door.

He stood back in the hallway for some time before he stepped into the room, closing the door softly.

All the lights were out. He did not hear anything. He thought that perhaps she was out. If she was, then he would have to wait for her. But that would be no good, because then she might be coming home with someone and that would spoil the whole bit. He had read in one of the columns that she had been to The Little Club last week with Bill Mallard, the singer. Bill had worked his show a couple of times. He was a nice kid. He had the sort of face you can buy in a can, but Harry couldn't blame him for going out after Susie. She was real class. He had nothing against the kid. But if she came home with him, then he could get hurt too. No sense in that.

He was about to turn and leave when he saw her. Lights from the street cast a dull grey and pink glow over the far side of the room. She was stretched out on the sofa, wearing gold toreodor pants and a bright red blouse and Persian slippers that curled over in front. He had seen her in this outfit before, but he could not remember when. He had kidded her about the slippers.

Now Harry waited for her to say something. He was sure she had heard him come in. He could see that one of her legs was raised, her foot on the sofa in a position to indicate she was not asleep. But she did not speak.

Slowly, he reached down into his pocket for the revolver. His fingers stiffened at first touch of it, but then he took hold of the handle and gripped it hard as if he were afraid it would attempt to squirm out of his grasp at the last moment.

He drew the gun out and pointed it at her. "Wassa matter," Harry asked her finally. "You think maybe this is some damn joke or somethin'? You think there's a big yak at the end? Do you?" He waited for an answer, but still she did not speak. "Well, I'll tell you a little somethin', baby—you have got a lot to learn." He nodded, pursing his heavy lips. "Yeah. On account of this is no joke, see? Nobody's goin' to go out and buy a fine new automobile because Harry Pinto made 'em laugh tonight. Nh-nh." He shook his head again. "Baby—look—don't you see what I got here in my hand?" He held the gun out in the palm of his hand as if to offer it to her. "I come here to put a bullet in you, baby. That's just what I'm goin' to do. But maybe you still think you're so high and mighty. . . ." He stopped here. He grinned stiffly. "You know when I was back in burlesque . . . when a guy would date one of you flossey fashion babes . . . you know we'd say how he was takin' the cold turkey on the sex bit. You know what I mean?" He laughed. "Yeah. The cold turkey. Back in burlesque. . . " He stopped again and nodded in a heavy, helpless kind of way. "Sure," he said then. "Sure. I know what you're thinkin'. That's where I belong, huh? Top banana in a fruit-stand town. Yeah . . . Not in your class . . . Maybe I slurp my soup, huh? . . . Do I? . . . Or. . . ." But even before he realized fully what he was doing, he fired three times at her head, mouthing words as he did that had no sound and then he stood there, staring at her, shaking his head slowly from side to side as if someone had just told him something he could not possibly believe.

"Baby. . . ." he said softly. "How come . . . you couldn't understand how much I loved you? . . . How come . . . like I had to be just for laughs and . . ." He let the revolver fall out of his hand onto the very thick carpet.

"Ooooooooh, baby. . . ." he groaned, half-sobbing, the sound deep in him, wrenching itself out painfully as he kept shaking his head from side to side and he went stumbling slowly forward towards the couch. "Ooooooooo . . . Jesus . . . baby . . . love. . . ." And he fell on her body, but as soon as he touched her, he shrieked out in horror and fell back, rolling over on the floor to get away from the sofa.

Sprawled out on the carpet, his hands behind him supporting his body, he stared incredulously at the figure on the sofa. He could not believe his eyes.

She was not dead; she was cardboard.

"Baby. . . ?" he muttered, even though he knew there could not possibly be any answer. "Baby. . . ?"

Because the figure on the sofa was cardboard—a full length, life-size poster board of an ad she had done last year for some cosmetic company. He had seen it in dozens of store windows. It had been a big campaign, one of the biggest of the year.

And Harry Pinto, big-time comic, sat there on the floor and he started to laugh, first in a disjointed kind way, the sound all trembling and broken and half made of crying, but then letting the laughter rise up full out of him, rolling out easily, getting louder and louder until, after a while, in the fragile shadows there in that perfect room, it sounded like someone crying out for help and certainly not like anyone laughing at anything that ever could have been funny.

A PERSONAL COMMENT

The publication of THE FANTASTIC UNIVERSE OMNIBUS (Prentice-Hall, $3.95) is recognition—not of the influence or lack of influence of the magazine—but recognition of the phenomenon what while the ranks of the magazines are thinning, there is renewed awareness, in trade publishing and elsewhere, of the importance and significance of this field in which we work.

Science Fiction is many things to many of us. It is an escape for some from the realities of the world around them—a glittering never-never land where they may walk in blissful ignorance of the storms just outside the magic portals. It is a way of life for still others who, attracted to the field for a variety of reasons, find in SF fandom an answer to needs as old as anything history can offer us.

And still others see in Science Fiction possible answers to the chaos and the confusion and the hopes of the fears and the dreams and the ambitions which are so much an integral part of our times. Somehow—some way—it is to be hoped that we will mature, we who call ourselves Man, and who ignore the possibility that Man may not be a unique phenomenon.

I would like to think that this latter point is what attracted some of you to *Fantastic Universe* and that this is what will make you want to read this book.

And still better—buy it!

HANS STEFAN SANTESSON

THE ABSENT-MINDED MURDER

by HENRY SLESAR

If Willard Pell had been a teacher instead of a research chemist, he might have been that classic caricature, the absent-minded professor. His students would have chuckled in the corridors over his latest absent-minded prank; they would have invented stories of his having kissed the cat and put his wife on the doorstep; they would have spoken with fond affection of his habits and mannerisms. Unfortunately, Willard Pell had no students, and no fond affection. His employers, the Abernathy Chemical Corporation, found his absent-mindedness a detriment to the company. And his wife, Katherine, was just plain disgusted with his forgetful approach to living.

One morning, after Willard had put on a pot of coffee and then made himself a cup of tea, she tightened her housecoat around her middle and told him exactly what was on her mind. It was nothing new to Willard; he had heard the same unpleasant melody before, and it was no trouble to tune out all the trebles and vibratos.

"You're not even listening," Katherine said shrilly. "You're off in some cloud cuckoo land. You never listen to me any more!"

"You never have much to say,"

Willard answered mildly, dipping his teabag. "We've just lost touch, Katherine, that's all there is to it."

"*We've* lost touch? You've been out of touch with everything for years. How long do you think anybody can put up with it?"

"*Some* people can."

"You mean Constance Glass?" Katherine drew herself up, as erect as a wooden Indian. "That sulphur-stained assistant of yours?"

Willard sighed, got up from the table, and took his winter coat out of the closet. His wife, too angered by the conversation, didn't bother to remind him that it was late Spring. He went out of the door and returned a moment later, muttering about the warmth of the weather. He changed into a topcoat, and left for the office. He was in a dark-clouded mood until he saw the yellow sunshine of Constance Glass's hair.

"Good morning, Constance," he said gravely.

"Good morning, Willard. The precipitation tests are all completed." She said it lovingly. She was a thin girl with an air of intense concentration. Her tiny features were dominated cruelly by a pair of thick-lensed eyeglasses. She was desperately in love with him. "Is anything wrong, Willard? You don't look happy."

"I'm not," he said curtly, changing into a laboratory smock.

"Your socks don't match," Constance said wistfully. "Someone should really take care of you, Willard."

"Not that *woman,*" he grumbled. "I'm seriously thinking of leaving her, Constance."

"Oh, Willard," she sighed.

He would have taken her into his arms, but one of the laboratory assistants entered. Instead, he whispered something about lunch, and they shared a squeeze of hands.

That night, Willard arrived home with a new determination. Instead of discussing it with Katherine, he demonstrated his purpose by solemnly packing a suitcase.

"Where do you think you're going?" she said from the doorway, arms akimbo.

"I'm leaving," he said flatly. "I'm moving into Constance's apartment. Since you refuse to allow the divorce—"

"Into her apartment?" Katherine smiled thinly. "Why, Willard, I didn't think you'd have the nerve. And what good do you suppose that will do? I could sue you for desertion, you know."

"Do your worst," Willard grumbled. "Constance and I talked it over, and we decided it would be the best thing for us. We don't give a damn about your petty moraliy—"

"I wasn't talking about morality," she said icily. "I was talking about something far more concrete. If you leave me, Willard, I'll sue you for every nickel. I'll attach your salary. I'll get you fired I'll see that you never work again—"

"Not logical," he said. "If I can't work, how can you get money from me?"

"Never mind your damned logic!" she screamed. I'll make you so miserable you'll wish you were never born! And for God's sake—stop packing my nightgowns!"

His wife stormed out of the house a few minutes later, leaving Willard Pell alone to contemplate her threats. He wasn't concerned about his job; he was too good a research chemist to be discharged on a domestic issue. But the thought of the heartaches Katherine could inflict on poor Constance Glass made him wince in actual pain. It had been a difficult decision for Constance, to flaunt convention for the sake of her love. And Katherine would make sure she would regret it.

He sighed, and closed the suitcase on the bed. No, there wasn't any easy solution; the problem had to be resolved by more drastic and final means.

Thinking hard, he went to the basement of the house and surveyed the store of chemicals he kept in his makeshift home laboratory. It had been some months since he had experimented here; Katherine's vituperative objections to the inevitable odors had discouraged him. He sat down at the dust-covered table and locked his hands under his chin. In a few minutes, he concocted a suitable explosive formula, consisting mainly of turpentine and hypochloride. The important problem was to time the catastrophe so that he could be absolved of blame. He would need a catalytic agent that would bring the explosive chemicals together in due course. It didn't take him long to resolve the problem, and by the time he was done, he felt sure that by this time tomorrow, he would never have to worry about Katherine again.

When he came up the stairs, his wife hadn't yet returned. He considered writing a note, but decided that his absence would be sufficient evidence of his intent. He took his suitcase in hand, gave one last look to the scene of his discontentment, and went out the door. He took a taxi to Constance Glass's apartment house on upper West End Avenue.

Constance opened the door and looked at him shyly.

"Welcome home, Willard."

The next morning, in cheerful mood, and with matching socks

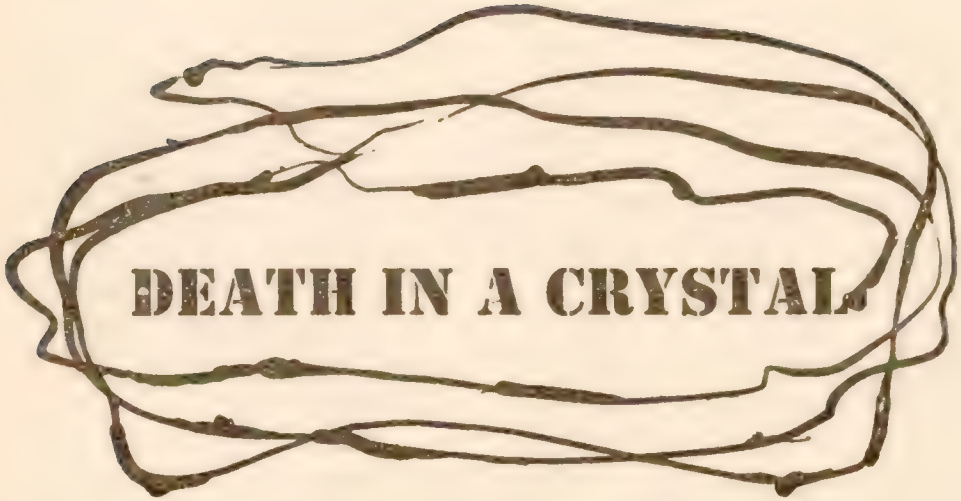
(supervised by Constance) he returned to the Abernathy Chemical Company. By prearrangement, Constance Glass arrived twenty minutes later. It wouldn't look well to arrive and leave together every day: the company might not understand the arrangement.

All day long, in a state of blissful happiness, he worked side by side with the woman he loved. Only once was there a reference to Katherine. It was at lunch. Constance, her eyes hooded behind the enormous eyeglasses, toyed with her fork and said: "What about *her*, Willard? What will she do about it?"

"I don't think she'll do anything," he said, patting her hand. "I don't think we'll ever have to worry about *her* again."

That evening, he changed from smock to street clothes, and with a final, warm exchange of glances between him and Constance, left the office of the Abernathy Company. Constance would follow half an hour later.

He walked into the apartment, and humming to himself, went to the kitchen and put a pot of coffee on the stove. He hadn't known such a sense of peace since before his unfortunate marriage. But it was no use regretting the mistakes of the past; he had corrected those mistakes with a vengeance. He felt no remorse about Katherine's untimely death; it had too logical a purpose. He had earned some happiness, and he was going to enjoy it. He settled down in his favorite easy chair and lit the pipe that Katherine hated him to smoke. He picked up the latest copy of his favorite chemical journal, and read an article about Amine Acids, muttering his disagreement with the author's conclusions. He was marvelously happy, until he began to wonder at his own comfort. If he was in Constance Glass's apartment, what was his favorite easy chair doing there? He looked down at it, recognizing the flowered slipcover. Then he realized that he wasn't in Constance's apartment at all; that he had automatically taken the bus to his home and was now in the familiar living room. He chuckled when he thought of how amused Constance would be when she heard about his silly error. He got up and went to the telephone, thinking to call her, and was dialing the number when he remembered the chemicals that were getting ready to meet in violence down in the basement. Suddenly, he wondered if his calculations had been correct. A moment later, as the floor exploded and vanished beneath his feet, he knew that they had. His last thought was a fleeting one of satisfaction in his work.



by JOSEPHINE BELL

The voices, all feminine, all excited by anger, rose and fell, and rose to even more emphatic heights. A stick was rapped sharply on the floor; a hand beat on a table.

In the hall, balancing the tray he was carrying, Rogers, the butler, pushed half open the door of the kitchen passage, and then waited, reluctant to leave such a promising quarrel unattended.

But the drawing room door was suddenly flung open, and Rogers slipped out of sight, bending his ear to the crack of the now closed passage door. He heard Nurse Simpson exclaim, "I can't stand her tantrums any longer. I shall go. I never asked her for anything. I never would. She's the absolute limit. Always taking advantage of her old angina. I wish she'd have a final attack. Serve her right."

Miss Cardew said, "Hush, Nurse. Don't say such things. It's all right for you. You can go whenever you want to. What about me? Tied to her because I can't afford to live alone."

Nurse Simpson muttered angrily. Miss Cardew went on, "Why do you argue with her? You know angina patients must not get angry. You argue and she says you bait her deliberately. She is wrong, but why argue?"

"She accused me of having designs on her money. I had to defend myself. She accused you, too. You didn't lie down under it, either."

"Well, you heard her say she was cutting out both of us from her will. She had the letter all ready."

"I wish she would. I'm sure I don't want her money."

A bell rang in the kitchen behind Rogers. Mrs. Rogers put her head out.

"Another rumpus, Ellen," he told her. "Take this tray and I'll go to her."

A few minutes later Rogers returned to his wife with a letter, which he put on the kitchen mantelpiece.

"Changing her will again," he said. "Better hold it over, like the others. I suppose she'll be wanting it back by tonight, and mad with me if I've taken it to the post."

"It pays not to provoke her. She never threatens to cut you out of her will, does she?" said Mrs. Rogers, complacently. She added, "Now for a couple of hours peace and quiet."

But she was wrong. About twenty minutes later the drawingroom bell rang, a loud prolonged ringing, followed by a short pause and another ring.

Rogers leaped up: he reached the room in a matter of seconds, and went in. On the other side of it he saw old Mrs. Merryweather lying back in her chair, gasping for breath. He saw the pallor of her cheeks, which increased as she raised the handkerchief in her hand to her lips. Then the hand fell limply to her lap. A breeze from the open window fluttered the chiffon scarf she wore at her neck.

While Rogers stood there, checked by the sight, but instantly ready to go forward, Miss Cardew pushed past him, running to her aunt's still form, and bending over her. She pressed a capsule she had in her hand into a fresh handkerchief she was carrying, and applied this to Mrs. Merryweather's face.

"The doctor!" she cried. "Quickly!"

Rogers ran to the telephone in the hall. A clatter on the stairs made him look up. Nurse Simpson was hurrying towards the drawing room. She also held a handkerchief and small box.

Fortunately Dr. Hughes was at home and was able to go at once to the house, but by the time he reached it Mrs. Merryweather was dead.

"That's the story," said Detective-Superintendent Mitchell. "Just as

Rogers told it. The doctor wasn't satisfied and asked for a post-mortem. Can you explain that?"

"Well, yes," said David Wintringham. "The butler said she was pale and got paler when she sniffed her handkerchief. That's not right."

"So Dr. Hughes said."

"Presumably it was an amyl nitrate capsule crushed up in the handkerchief. It should have made her flush, initially, not go pale."

"There was a lethal dose of potassium cyanide in her stomach," said Mitchell.

David whistled.

"Go ahead," he said. "Miss Cardew, Nurse Simpson, Rogers and his wife. All beneficiaries under her will, I suppose. Anyone else?"

"The gardener, a man called Brown. Mind you, she was in the habit of revoking these legacies, sometimes as often as twice a week. It was a farce, really, and they all knew it. At least, they all knew she never had the instructions sent to her lawyer after all. Rogers told me he was expected to hold the letters until she recovered her temper, and then give them back to her. But they could never be quite sure she might not, one day, do as she threatened. And on that particular afternoon she was furious with the lot of them,—except Rogers, he says. Miss Cardew, on the other hand, says he came in for a certain amount of abuse, too."

"And the gardener?"

"In a way. He was digging the bed under the drawing room window when the three women were quarrelling in the room. He says Mrs. Merryweather was always making trouble, and though he heard the angry voices quite plainly, he paid very little attention. He says after the two had gone, the old lady signalled to him to open the window, which he was able to do at the bottom. She then scolded him for listening, and told him to go away. That was the last he saw of her, he says."

"Where did the cyanide come from?"

"Probably from a bottle they had bought to kill wasps in the garden. The stuff was in square crystal blocks. Miss Cardew produced it from the tool-shed and said she had no idea how much had been used for the wasps. Brown denied using it at all."

"But he knew it was there?"

"They all did."

David thought for a few minutes.

"Did Dr. Hughes notice a smell of cyanide in the room or from the body?"

"No. He said there was a smell of amyl nitrate only. After all, Miss Cardew administered a capsule in

her handkerchief when she reached Mrs. Merryweather's side, and Nurse Simpson had cracked open another one directly she got to her patient. So the pear-drops were much in evidence."

"Far too much. Have you decided why both these ladies were on the spot in such an incredibly short time? Isn't it a bit suspicious?"

"Very highly so. Miss Cardew invariably goes for a walk on a fine afternoon, as this was. Nurse Simpson goes off duty, and lies down to sleep. Yet both were there within a few seconds of the invalid's bell being rung."

"Which of them was last with Mrs. Merryweather?"

"Nurse Simpson. After the conversation with Miss Cardew in the hall, the one Rogers overheard, the nurse went back to Mrs. Merryweather to make her comfortable. They did not speak a word, Nurse says, but she saw that her patient had everything she needed."

"Brown had opened the window before Nurse went back, I suppose? She did not shut it again?"

"She didn't dare to suggest it."

"You say she saw that her patient had everything she needed. Including amyl nitrite?"

"One capsule only, she said. She explained that that was why she brought down a new box when she heard the bell ring."

"But Miss Cardew had capsules ready for an emergency, too?"

"Yes."

"Nurse Simpson could hardly have made the old lady eat a capsule, covering and all, when she wasn't even having her attack yet."

"No."

"Besides, the attack would have come on sooner in that case. Miss Cardew was alone with her aunt, though, when Rogers was telephoning."

"After the attack started. Rogers had seen her suffering from the effects of the poison, though he did not recognise that fact at the time."

David thought again, and then he said, "Did you count the handkerchiefs?"

"The what?"

"The handkerchiefs. Mrs. Merryweather was sniffing at hers when Rogers saw her. Miss Cardew administered a capsule, which she had brought into the room, in her own handkerchief, I suppose? Or was it in Mrs. Merryweather's. And the nurse in her own. I think you should check those handkerchiefs, Steve. And the amount of amyl nitrite in the house, and where it was located."

"I think you may be right," said Mitchell.

The following day David and

Mitchell sat in the drawing room of Mrs. Merryweather's house. Mrs. Rogers had just left the room.

"You see," said David. "There is a handkerchief of the old lady's missing. What a good thing Mrs. Rogers is methodical, and so devoted. It does look, doesn't it, as if that single capsule was not all it should have been?"

"I don't see how anyone in this house could make a thin glass capsule and put cyanide inside it," said Mitchell.

"They wouldn't have to make it. You know the fine silk mesh there is on the outside of these things, to prevent people cutting themselves on the glass when they break it? Well, I think the guilty party got hold of a used one and cleared out the glass and put in some crystals of cyanide from the bottle in the toolshed. I think the old lady, when she started a genuine angina attack, after her bout of bad temper, was too ill to notice there was anything wrong. She just clapped the thing to her face after pressing it to break the glass, and breathed in deeply, with her mouth open, as they all do. I think a bit of the stuff, broken off, or squeezed by her action through the mesh, fell into her mouth, and she swallowed it. Otherwise it might not have killed her, or not so easily, though the angina, untreated, might have finished her off."

"It was treated,—very liberally, —when it was too late."

"Exactly. And both women agree there was only the one capsule available in Mrs. Merryweather's box. Neither denies it."

"They were both close to the old lady when she was dying. Either could have taken the poisoned handkerchief, unnoticed by the other."

"Miss Cardew says she gave her nitrite in Mrs. Merryweather's own handkerchief."

"Nurse Simpson says she gave her dose in her own, but she saw another handkerchief on the old lady's lap."

"And Mrs. Rogers says a handkerchief of Mrs. Merryweather's is missing. She could have picked it up off the floor, couldn't she? And deny that the one found with Mrs. Merryweather was hers. She merely says there is one short."

"Miss Cardew could have brought along a handkerchief belonging to Mrs. Merryweather."

"Easily. And you've forgotten one thing, Steve. Mrs. Merryweather had cyanide in her own handkerchief, the first one used. Whoever got to her first must have smelled it and has not said so."

"Rogers?" Mitchell exclaimed.

"Only he swears he stayed near

the door, and then went back into the hall, because Miss Cardew arrived and pushed in past him."

David jumped to his feet.

"I'm an idiot," he exclaimed. He went to the window and threw it up. As he did so Miss Cardew walked into the room.

"You're the very person we wanted to see," said David. "Tell me, this window was open on the day your aunt died, wasn't it?"

"Yes," she said. "Brown opened it for her, according to him."

David leaned out.

"And he had just been digging up the bed under it, hadn't he? The window is set very low, Miss Cardew. I can reach the soil quite easily if I lean out fairly far."

He straightened up again, and turned towards her.

"You got into the room first when your aunt was taken ill, didn't you? You leaned over her to give her the dose of amyl you had brought. Was there no smell of cyanide? Because she died of acute cyanide poisoning, didn't she? That handkerchief of hers with the crystals in it? Did you push it in behind these wallflowers, Miss Cardew, or beside them? It is somewhere here in the soft earth, isn't it, Miss Cardew?"

Her cry of despair gave them the answer.

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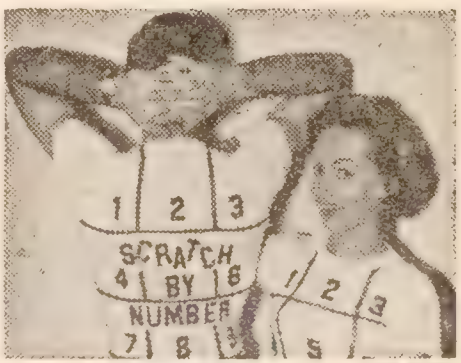

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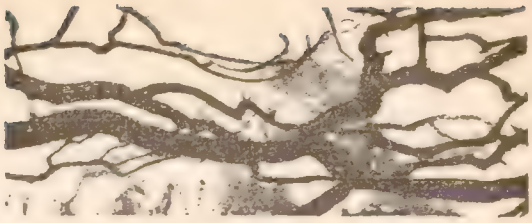

NIGHT WATCHMAN

by RACHEL ALBRIGHT

The rain began at five o'clock. But it wasn't the rain that caused Ann Viking to shiver as she typed. It was Joan's armor that gave her the creeps. Of all things, she thought, to have Joan of Arc's suit of armor on the premises!

Usually she loved the old things that surrounded her—jades, ivories, paintings, tapestries. It had been a pleasure to work for Rex Fontaine, importer of antiques and *objets d'art.* His offices in the penthouse suite of La Salle Towers were an enchanting background for a girl with dreams. But she had begun to feel uneasy the minute the expressman wheeled in the long box that looked so startlingly like a coffin.

"Wonderful find!" Fontaine had said. "They say Joan of Arc once wore it. Do you believe that?" Then while Ann was at lunch he had put the oblong box in his vault and left for a week in New York.

He would be back tomorrow, she reminded herself, and she still had a book of notes to transcribe. She had delayed doing them all week. But her typing went no farther than one letter . . .

The figure of a man darkened the frosted glass of the door marked *Entrance* and Ann's brown eyes clouded. Philip Carson, of course. His silhouette was unmistakable.

And she had no time just now for more of his absurd talk. The smile she put on was the one usually reserved for people who took the wrong elevator—the express that led only to the Fontaine penthouse.

The door opened and a tall young man entered. Raindrops were clinging to his bare head. "Hi, Ann," he grinned and Ann's forced smile was suddenly real.

"Hi, Philip."

"How about having dinner with me," he invited. "I won a law suit today. I feel like celebrating."

"Oh, I can't tonight." Her eyes clouded again. "Mr. Fontaine's coming back tomorrow and I have hours of work still to do."

Philip's eyes smouldered. "Mr. Fontaine! Always Mr. Fontaine!" He laid a rough hand on her shoulder. "You've got to quit this job, Ann. Get away in time—tonight! The man's mad! He'll kill you just as he killed your sister."

"Please, Philip," she soothed him. "It's you who are acting crazy. Mr. Fontaine had nothing to do with Marcia's death. It was accidental. We've been over all that before." She glanced at the French window behind her desk and shuddered. "She was looking out of the window and lost her balance. She was alone, Philip. The testimony at the inquest proved that."

"Will *you* be alone this evening?"

"Of course—after the cleaning women go. What of it? I tell you, Philip, I'm grateful for this job. You know what a wretched time Marcia and I used to have. Mr. Fontaine gave Marcia the first good salary she ever received. He was quite ill about the accident. It still keeps him from sleeping, he says. He had bars installed at the window before he let me enter the office."

Philip Carson walked to the window and shook the grating. It was very firm. "I could swear I saw Fontaine at the airport an hour ago," he said. "What makes you think he hasn't returned to Chicago?"

"I talked to him from New York this very afternoon."

Philip smiled grimly. "Do you suppose I really am losing my wits? Well, I'll be at my desk beside the window over there"—he looked out across the street—"all evening. If you need me, give me a ring."

"Thank you, Philip," said Ann, and he went away. She sighed as she heard the elevator door clang behind him. He really ought to consult a psychiatrist. His obsession that Rex Fontaine was mad, that he had caused Marcia's death, was absurd. Now he was imagining other things—like seeing Fontaine at the Chicago airport when she had just

talked with him—at once he'd told her where he was—in New York. Of course there was some jealousy in it. Rex Fontaine was an attractive man. So was Philip, of course, but he worked too hard. He had paid his way through law school as a court reporter and now he was working like a beaver with a law firm across the street.

She went back to her typing but almost immediately two shadows outlined themselves against the door. Then they were in the room—old Mrs. Bridger and Mrs. O'Fancy, armed with mops and dusters.

"Hello," Ann said brightly. "And aren't you the early birds?"

"A God-fearing woman better be an early bird in *this* office and get away early," said Mrs. O'Fancy grimly, and stalked into the room marked *Rex Fontaine, Private.*

"Don't pay any attention to her," said Mrs. Bridger, as Ann raised her eyebrows. Moving closer, the old woman whispered: "She's queer, if you know what I mean. Her husband was the window washer whose strap broke a year ago. Forty floors he fell from that little window in Mr. Fontaine's vault."

"I didn't know," said Ann. "How terrible." But as she returned to her work she wondered if nerves were not contagious. First Philip, then this peculiar old Mrs. O'Fancy. Her own nerves had been acting up, too, ever since the arrival of Joan's armor.

The cleaning women had scarcely finished their work and left the suite before there was another interruption. *Squeak! Squeak!* sounded a small voice and a tiny mouse ran from beneath the bookcase and disappeared under the door of Fontaine's office. "Oh, Baby Mouse," Ann cried, "we can't have *you* in this place." She followed the little creature into the office, switched on a light, and was just in time to see it slide under the great steel door of the vault.

Of all calamities that could occur in Rex Fontaine's business, one mouse among his rare manuscripts could be the most disastrous. Ann had never been in the vault herself, but she had an inventory of its contents: rare books, historical documents and priceless papers. And now Joan's armor was there, although of course the mouse couldn't damage that. She stared at the steel door. It was simply impregnable, for she didn't have the combination that unlocked it. The manager of the building didn't have it. No one had it but Mr. Fontaine, and he wouldn't be back until morning.

She looked frantically about the room as if seeking a solution to the predicament, although common

sense told her there was no solution. But wait! Perhaps Marcia had known how to unlock the great door. Perhaps she had written the combination down somewhere. She hurried back to her desk, once Marcia's. It had been emptied completely even before Ann had come to work there. But something must be left of Marcia's besides the little flashlight that Ann now used when pencils rolled under her desk. Ah! The dictionary! Marcia's battered old dictionary. It hadn't been thrown away. And that was where good secretaries hid office secrets. She turned quickly to the back of the book. Surely this was it! Unlisted telephone numbers, the amount of the alimony check a former Mrs. Fontaine received, and —a safe combination in Marcia's neat writing.

Ann carried the dictionary to the vault and knelt down. She followed the directions, backward . . . forward . . . backward . . . forward, until—*click!* She turned the knob, pulled, and the door swung open. She entered the vault and pulled the cord of a swinging bulb, flooding the small chamber with light. She looked around her and gasped. Her face turned a sickening grey.

The vault was not a repository for rare paintings, books and manuscripts. It was lined with suits of armor. Heavy, forbidding suits of mail. Suddenly she shrank away from them. She almost screamed. Something white showed through the elbow joints, the half opened headpieces. The suits were not empty!

Her mouth opened. For a terrible moment she tried—and failed—to find her voice. This was what Philip had been trying to tell her. Madness! Madness and murder!

Then just as suddenly she took herself in hand. "Don't be a fool," she said aloud. "Find out. Be sure!"

With an effort she approached one of the sinister suits of armor and lifted the headpiece. The face of a mannequin looked out at her, a wax model intended no doubt for a store window. Quickly she lifted some of the other headpieces and almost laughed. But there was a note of hysteria in her voice when she finally said *Well! Well!* The experience was a gruesome one at best. One of the mannequins apparently had been too tall for its iron suit. A pair of plaster feet, crudely chopped away, lay in a corner.

Joan's armor was still in its box, the lid of which lay beside it. But *this* mailed suit was an empty shell. Fontaine had found no mannequin for it. Ann looked beyond it and her fingers became icy. . . . In a far

corner of the vault a narrow stairway slanted upward to a trapdoor in the roof!

She had seen enough at last. Swiftly she snapped off the light and backed from the room. She banged the door shut and spun the dial. She could see it all now! Marcia had *not* been alone the night of her death. Not necessarily. The testimony of the elevator operator that he had brought no one to the penthouse after Fontaine left meant nothing. Fontaine had a secret entrance through the roof.

And O'Fancy, the window-washer? Had his strap really broken? Or had he seen something through that tiny window in the vault—something he was not intended to see?

Spurred to action at last, Ann darted to her desk. She must leave at once. She would call Philip. How she had misjudged him! Now they *would* go to the chief of police.

She closed her desk quickly, slipped into her coat, closed the windows and started for the door. Half way across the room she stopped short, and her heart too seemed to stop. The shadow of a man was now outlined against the frosted glass. She recognized the smart Homburg, the broad shoulders beneath the raglan-sleeved coat.

Rex Fontaine entered jauntily. "Hello, Ann," he said. "I was hoping I'd catch you. I've some rush letters to get off tonight." As if suddenly aware of her coat, he added, "Oh, were you leaving? Going out to dinner?"

"Yes, Mr. Fontaine." Ann tried to smile naturally.

"Good," he said. "We'll do the letters at once and then I'll take you to dinner. To the Palmer House, the Blackstone, wherever you say. How would you like that?"

"It would be wonderful," Ann said. She was beginning to get control of herself. Somehow she made her hands stop shaking as she removed her coat and shoved her boots behind the desk. It would be easy to escape—from a restaurant—she thought. The ladies room? But there were many ways. She looked into the private office. Fontaine was removing his hat and coat, hanging them up, moving toward his desk. Now he was sitting down and opening his brief case in his usual deliberate manner.

"I'm ready," he called. She picked up her book and pencils and went to join him.

The letters were long and there was a dozen of them. When he finished at last and she rose to go, he motioned her to sit down again. "You're pale tonight, Ann," he said. "Don't you feel well?"

"I really don't feel well," she answered honestly. "I've a cold coming on, I'm afraid."

"Unfortunate," he commented. "Perhaps, after all, we had better not go out. It's still raining. We'll have our dinners sent here." He reached for the telephone and dialed. "The Wacker Grill? Two orders of your Friday night special to the penthouse suite in LaSalle Towers. And plenty of coffee—a potful. I'm working very late tonight." He replaced the phone. "There, my dear! After a hot dinner you'll feel more like doing those letters."

"B-but, Mr. Fontaine—" Ann started to remonstrate.

"You lie here on my sofa," he interrupted with a gesture, "and rest until those orders arrive. I'll receive them."

Obediently she lay down on the sofa but her mind reached new levels of activity as it canvassed every avenue of escape. She was convinced now that Fontaine was utterly mad. Clearly she was not to be allowed to speak to the waiter who'd bring the dinners, or slip him a note—or scream. Something told her that, if she screamed, Fontaine would explain it cleverly enough to get rid of the waiter, and after that it wouldn't matter. It was best to play along with him until she could get word to Philip. The window? the telephone?

Some action of her own, she realized, had roused Fontaine's suspicion. What could it have been? Her eyes swept the room and suddenly she knew. She saw that Fontaine knew. The sawdust trail! Joan's armor had been packed in sawdust. The trail started at the door of the vault and led, faintly but clearly, to her desk.

She must do something at once. Fontaine's telephone was only an arm's length away. With infinite caution she reached for it. . . .

"No, no, Ann," came his voice from the doorway. "You must rest now." He strolled easily to his desk and put the telephone in a drawer. As he repassed her he reached down and patted her shoulder. "Naughty girl," he said, and hurried to answer the waiter's tap on the outer door.

Ann forced herself to be quiet. It was all she could do to keep from calling to the man outside the door; but deep inside she knew that would only hasten the tragedy. Her salvation depended upon outwitting Fontaine—outwitting a mad man!

She heard the elevator depart and immediately Fontaine loomed up in the doorway with a basket of food. "Now you may come in," he said. "We'll have dinner at your desk, if you like."

Ann rose swiftly. At least she could pretend to eat. It would delay the crisis. And she had a plan at last, if only it would work! She produced clean towels from somewhere, spread them across the desk and placed the food upon it: filet of sole, baked potatoes, still steaming, double portions of butter, salads, rolls and a great pot of coffee.

Fontaine drew up two chairs, then looked toward the windows still silvery with rain. "I'll draw the curtains," he said. "More cheerful, don't you think?" He adjusted the heavy draperies with care, shutting out the night, the world, and Philip. He sat down across the desk from Ann. "Coffee now or later?" he asked.

Rex Fontaine could be fascinating. In spite of her fear, Ann found herself listening, making suitable replies. He had seen a play he liked in New York. He had been to the opera. And he was still enthusiastic about Joan's armor. "The finest piece of craftsmanship I ever saw," he raved. "Made for a woman too—that's exceptional." He drained his coffee cup and looked at Ann appraisingly, "Joan of Arc must have been just about your size, Ann."

"Indeed?"

He lit a cigarette and stood up. "I'll get back to my desk and give you a chance to do those letters."

As she cleared away the dishes and opened her typewriter, Ann tried to keep her eyes from straying into the next room. She knew his eyes were on her. He no longer bothered even to pretend interest in the open file before him. She rolled a letterhead into the machine, typed for a time, and removed it. Half way through the second letter desperation suddenly possessed her. She grabbed for the telephone. If she could only let the operator know something was wrong! Amazingly, Fontaine didn't stop her. She put the instrument to her ear. There was no dial tone.

Perhaps she had known all along that she would not get away with it. She hadn't seen him cut the wires. But they were cut.

She wheeled another sheet of paper into her machine and typed. If she had only listened to Philip! He was so close. Only across the street. Surely she could push the curtains back long enough to signal—open the window long enough to scream.

Fontaine was still watching her. Almost as if he had read her thoughts, he spoke. "I'll open a window. You must be getting warm." The window he opened was the window of his own office, opening on a deserted inner court.

The night air was cool and refreshing. Ann typed more slowly.

With an effort she finished the fifth letter, then the sixth. In the middle of the seventh the desperation left her eyes for an instant. She remembered her loose heel! Feeling carefully for the right rung—there must be no failure here—she hooked the heel to it and pulled sharply. Off came the heel. It flew half way across the room—almost to the doorway to safety. On one heel Ann flew after it. . . . But just as she seized the doorknob Fontaine caught up with her.

"What in the world," he asked. "Oh, your heel."

"It came off," Ann said. "I'll have to ask the operator to take it to the repair shop for me."

Fontaine took the heel from her and looked at it curiously. "It really came off, didn't it?" he said. "I can fix it for you in a minute. I have a hammer in my desk and all kinds of nails." He vanished into his own room as he spoke, hammered efficiently for a time, and came back with the shoe. "Lift your foot," he said.

"Thank you," Ann said miserably, and returned to her typing.

How she wished she had no private washroom off her private clothes closet! She typed more slowly and yet more slowly. Fontaine had not taken his eyes from her for ten minutes. He wasn't even pretending any more. He was just —waiting. Presently he rose and stood in the doorway watching as she typed the ninth letter.

"Almost finished, Ann?" he asked. "I'm almost ready too." And then—miraculously—he left his position, turned his back upon her, and hurried to the vault. His long fingers began swiftly to turn the dial.

It was her chance at last! She would rush to the elevator shaft and scream. How she would scream! She would scream till they heard her in Gary! Silently, noiselessly, she sped across the room and tried to open the door . . . the knob resisted her. Somehow he had double-locked the door.

It would have to be the window now. She turned and darted back—then halted half way across the room. Fontaine was staggering from the vault with Joan's armor clutched in his arms. He propped the suit of mail against the wall.

"It's beautiful, Ann," he said with glistening eyes. "But not half as beautiful as you will be inside it. I shall keep you in it always. Your lovely golden hair will grow out of the crevices, and Philip Carson will never see you again in this world."

Ann gripped the desk and tried to speak. "Oh Mr. Fontaine," she cried at last, "surely I'm not—tall

enough! Joan was quite a tall girl, you know." She was thinking desperately, looking everywhere about the room. "I wonder what we can do—I wonder who we can get—Oh!" Her roving eyes lighted upon her galoshes, tucked away beneath the desk. "My galoshes!" She laughed wildly. "The heels are quite high—Oh, very high, indeed!"

She was praying now, praying hard, as she knelt behind her desk. Her left hand was fumbling with her galoshes, but her right hand was reaching for Marcia's flashlight. Then she had it. Softly, gently—making innocent noises with her boots—she thrust the little flashlight through the draperies and swung it with a curious motion horizontally and downward. Twice she managed to project her slender hieroglyphic gleam into the darkness before Fontaine's hands reached her throat. After that for a time she knew nothing at all.

Later there was light everywhere and Philip was bending over her. A policeman was rubbing her hands and saying, "She's opening her eyes, I think." But Philip stopped her when she tried to speak.

"Don't try to talk yet," he said. "Everything's going to be all right. I got your message." He glanced at the policeman. "Do you know what this bright girl did? She had ten seconds of grace—it couldn't have been more—and she flashed an S.O.S. in shorthand. Two words—*Help! Help!*"

"Lucky for her you happened to be watching," the policeman said.

"*Happened* to be watching!" Philip said. "My God! My eyes haven't left that window for four hours!"

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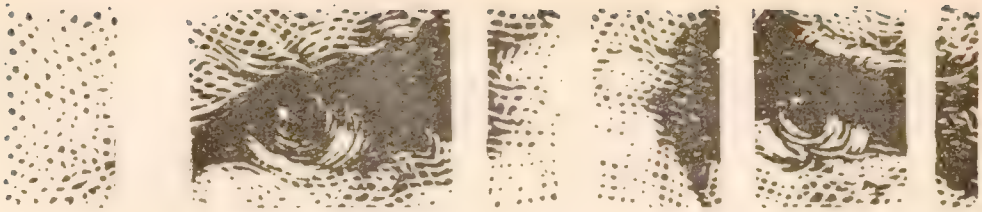

A MAN WITHDRAWN

by LEONARD J. GUARDINO

Orlando Cruz made up with brain what he lacked in physical assets. He was short, thin and mild-mannered, but as a Filipino lawyer in Manila was well known and respected.

The one cross in Orlando's life was his brother-in-law, Bogado. Bogado, a farmer, was a big reticent man, always carrying a grudge in life and usually taking it out on his wife Melana.

Little Orlando resented much the way his sweet-mannered sister put up with Bogado's cruelty. If she had more sense—no, she wouldn't. Love is a very strange thing. No matter how badly Bogado treated Melana, she never ran away. Though Orlando was a single man himself, he could understand this. Women—some of them—loved their husbands even while getting beaten up too much.

However it didn't stop Orlando with trying to put in a good word once in a while. He would visit Nueva Viscaya county, squat down in front of his calloused brother-in-law in traditional peasant fashion and say: "At least listen to me, Bogado. Please don't hold your ears or walk out on me the way you always do."

"Why not, if you constantly come here to say the same things," said

the big farmer, stoically. "Before the conversation is over you will have told me that there is a limit to wife-beating on a farm—that the law dictates a farmer should never render the hardest-working member of the family incapable of using the caribou and plow."

"That's true," Orlando stated sadly. "A peasant wife is built more for work than walloping. The more she is chastised the more useless she becomes for labor, with result that you perform most of the rigorous chores on the farm and local farmers shake their heads at your thoughtlessness."

"I am holding my ears again," said Bogado, looking irked.

Little Orlando looked at his sister Melana, who sat in a corner of the house ever her sweet silent self. The lawyer muttered angry words under his breath, then he said:

"Bogado, you hate to listen to any one or anything. That is an unwise habit. You hardly mingle with the natives, never care what they are doing and you never ask after their health. Because of this, they shun you. You are only cutting your own nose to spite your face. A man like you cannot last long anywhere."

"What do you mean?" demanded the farmer.

"You should cut down on your drinking. What is it that makes you bear a grudge against life?"

The big man stood up and turned his back. "What is there to like about life?" he asked. "The way I do things is the way I feel like doing them."

"I have heard of people like you," sighed Orlando. "Mean always, without a cause—or do you need a psychiatrist, Bogado? I can recommend one for the sake of yours and my sister's happiness."

"No doctors for me. I just hate people, that's all! Can a doctor start making me like people again?" the farmer swore.

"A doctor can. I will travel to Manila with you."

"I will stay here. You go back to Manila and mind your business."

Orlando knew it was no use, still he didn't give up: "You're a very tired man, Bogado. Did you ever take a good look at yourself?"

"I feel all right. Don't worry."

Melana spoke up: "Poor Bogado, he works so hard. So hard."

"How can you love such a man?" Orlando demanded.

"You are always asking me that, my brother," she said, misty-eyed.

"For the last three years since you married him! And I will always keep asking that!" Orlando vowed.

"You are so smart," Melana smiled, through her tears. "I am

always happy to see you—even if Bogado is not . . ." she turned toward her husband, "Bogado, why aren't you happy to see Orlando when he comes here?"

"Because I don't like listening to him!"

"But you don't like to listen to anyone," said Melana, sadly. "You are always with yourself—the same thoughts."

The big Filipino farmer made an impatient face and walked out of the house. The same thing always happened whenever Orlando came from the city to pay them a visit.

It was on the following week that little Orlando Cruz came to Nueva Viscaya to discover that his sister and brother-in-law no longer lived there anymore. Deeply concerned, he asked a native where they had gone.

"I do not know, sir. But the whole village does not miss Bogado!"

"Where can I find out where they moved to?"

"The good man in the chapel will tell you, sir."

Orlando had met Padre Ortento Bey, a white-haired mestizo priest, about a year before, when the latter had come to Bogado's farm seeking alms for the poor. Bogado had offered the priest a chicken—a sick one to boot. Hardly a centavo. Appalled by his brother-in-law's lack of human charity, Orlando had given Padre Bey twenty pesos in donation. The old priest had not forgotten this kindness and he was very glad to see the little lawyer once more.

When they were seated in the small chapel, Orlando asked: "What happened, Padre? My poor sister —Bogado. Where have they gone?"

"In Natividad—where no one seems to care about wife-beaters," the old Filipino said. "It is a large village. Bogado should be happier there where people mind their own business and do not care if Bogado is a friendly citizen or not. In short, I have ostrasized him from Nueva Viscaya."

The little lawyer looked sad, but said nothing. The padre went on: "It is a wise person who knows that the law is better off obed than challenged. It is one with keener vision who does not defy the church. Bogado did, very strenuously. I merely came to tell him to ease up on his brutalities. Bogado told me to go to a place that I have worked all my life to stop people from going to. It was too much, and I took immediate action.

"We held a town council. We decided to sell Bogado's farm to an-

other local farmer. The constable took care of this. Bogado was forced to obey as the natives were threatening him—one of them swearing that he would burn down his farm while he slept one night. Bogado signed the deed hastily. The last I heard, he bought a farm in Natividad."

Orlando sighed deeply and said: "If he had a heart more for his wife than for his drinking, everything would be fine. Too bad."

"The question is, does Bogado have a heart at all?"

"He seemed to when he first came to Manila and courted my sister. He smiled much and seemed eager to listen to everything. Suddenly, he changed. Was it my sister that made him change, padre?"

"A man changes himself," the old padre said, ironically. "From what I've seen of Melana, she is a good, sweet woman. No, whatever the reason, Bogado has himself to blame."

"Thank you, padre. That is the way I have always felt. There is something wrong in Bogado's mind, I guess."

What was wrong with the big Filipino farmer's mind? For one, it was not his steady drinking, which hardly affected his dull senses; nor was that Melana had failed to interest him as a wife after three years. The truth laid in heredity. His father, and his father before him had been victims of manic depression—usually besetting them before they reached thirty. It was simple and unfortunate as that. Bogado's father had murdered a butcher just because he had cut up the meat wrong. He was executed by the authorities at the age of thirty-one. Bogado's grandfather had murdered his wife in her sleep for no apparent reason and was, also, executed.

Now the natives of Natividad didn't seem to notice the newcomers. They went about their chores and business as if Bogado and Melana had lived there all their lives. Thus, not to be noticed at all, angered Bogado not a little. Melana tried to explain to him that it was because of his extreme unfriendliness that the natives ignored him.

She added: "There isn't a place in this world where one cannot get along with people. But one must prove that he cares much for them as he does himself."

"Nobody asked you for a lecture," Bogado growled, over a bottle of tooba wine.

"Not a lecture. A truth, my husband. To get along decently a farmer, especially, should acquaint himself with the civic and human

responsibilities of his village. To remain aloof can produce trouble."

"What kind?" he demanded.

"Any kind. It is wiser to know what is going on in one's community at all times."

Bogado gave her a threatening look. Melana, wisely, ceased speaking and went out to the field to use the plow and caribou.

The big Filipino farmer brooded much in the days to follow. He didn't want to know anything about anybody. His wife's progress with the plow was enough. Already the field had ceased looking to be scrubby from the way they had found it. A good harvest of vegetables loomed well in the promise.

He drank a little more than he was used to—Little Orlando the lawyer noticed on his visit and didn't like it. Strangely, Orlando wondered about not seeing his sweet sister not marked up, for the first time. Usually, on his visits, she always sported a blackened eye and worse.

In a way he was happy about this. In another way he wasn't. Bogado was drinking more, and might deal her worse than a mere blackeye in the future. However, he didn't mention anything to anger Bogado, and had more or less a pleasant visit.

Bogado seldom entered the village, except to buy something needed for his farm. He took to long walks in the country ignoring everyone and everything, even the bumble-bees that nearly stung him. Sometimes he would stop to speak aloud, as though addressing Melana: "I don't want to hear any gossip. I don't want to learn anything of civic responsibilities. Shut up! All I want is silence and work from you. Do you hear me?"

A half kilometer away from Bogado's farm lived some neighbors who grew mango trees. The big farmer had always avoided them. One afternoon, for no apparent reason he could think of, his feet headed in the mango farm's direction and wouldn't go any other way.

Not far from his objective he hid behind a tree to spy on a beautiful mestiza woman and another homely woman working side by side picking mangos from laden branches. In a bolt, Bogado became enamored of the pretty, dark-haired, voluptuously molded mestiza. He developed a habit of spying on the two women regularly. The more he came there, the more he secretly desired the pretty mestiza. The homely one, he hated more on each visit.

While his wife slaved in the fields, there were many times when Bogado lay on the shaded porch-

floor of his bamboo house drinking tooba wine and often dreaming of the pretty woman from the next farm. If only his wife Melana looked that beautiful, he thought. He'd sooner stoop to kiss her knees than to beat her. Melana was only sweet—and like too much money in one's milk, one could tire of that quickly.

From his usual spying position Bogado had learned from the beautiful girl's talk that she and the homely one were the two wives of an old Filipino named Octupo, owner of the mango farm. The homely one was yet to make a comment. She was the stoic, nodding type. Never a word. The pretty one did all the talking—which Bogado didn't mind. Unfortunately, because of the homely woman's untalkativeness, he had yet to learn the pretty one's name.

Bogado began to get some strange ideas—like jumping from his hiding place and killing the ugly woman. Then he would have the pretty one to himself. He discarded this notion, and thought it would be better to go to old Octupo and bargain for his pretty wife, but Bogado didn't want to get familiar or talk with any old farmer. Day and night his mind forever ruminated without success on the best ways to own the pretty one for himself.

Finally, he decided to get rid of Octupo. But how? A murder had to be performed not only cleverly, but perfectly to escape the law's clutches. That much he knew—but he was at a loss for murder ideas of the sort.

Because of his very pensive mood of late, Melana began to talk to Bogado more and more. He hardly listened, but she didn't care. All she knew was, Bogado wasn't telling her to shut up like he used to. She began to believe that her husband was on the mend, thinking more along the good, because it shone on his changed face. His eyes all lighted up—perhaps he was thinking of the bountiful harvest to come on their farm.

Then as from a distance, Bogado heard his wife say— "and she came to borrow a handful of sugar today."

"Huh? Who came here?" he asked.

Melana smiled: "Sanfronia, one of mango farmer's two wives."

"What does she look like?"

"Homely. But the other one is beautiful—Angela."

Bogado exulted inwardly. A name most appropriate for her beauty. He nodded and said nothing. Melana asked: "You have not met them?"

"No!" he snapped harshly.

His wife went on: "Sanfronia is the homely one, always borrowing sugar. I met the beautiful one once. She was riding a caribou to go to the village and stopped where I was working, on the edge of the field. She laughed and said the whole village knew about Sanfronia's sweet tooth. Then she grew more serious and said that she and Sanfronia were very happy with their old husband Octupo."

Bogado frowned: "You're beginning to know a lot, aren't you?"

"Of course—that's the way it should be—even to the point of knowing other people's habits. Like Octupo and Angela. They drink much tea, but without sugar in it. Only the homely one, Sanfronia, puts in so much that it's a tearful thing for them to watch."

"Please stop talking of foolish nothings!" warned Bogado.

Melana fell silent and Bogado reached for another bottle of tooba very thoughtfully. Bogado himself knew about the tea habit. On two separate occasions he had spied on Angela and Sanfronia cooking the evening meal for their old husband. The women had always gone about this duty silently. Only once had Angela spoken to call out to Octupo that supper was ready.

He had gotten a first look at Octupo's bent, wrinkled state and hated him on sight. He didn't deserve a pretty prize like Angela. Sometimes, in his spying, it got on Bogado's nerves watching them supping without saying a word—he usually headed back home muttering to himself.

Now as Bogado drained the bottle, he recalled how Octupo's wives went about preparing supper. One pot for the rice and fish. One pot for the tea. These were private for their husband . . . while Angela and Sanfronia ate from their own respective pots. This was peasant tradition and nothing new to Bogado, the idea being that the master of the house was to share his pots with no one.

The four pots were always readied with water in them—set on the stone-hearth right outside the farmhouse. It was Sanfronia's duty to attend to this an hour before quitting time from their duties of mango picking. When their work was done, Sanfronia and Angela merely poured the rice into the pots and started cooking . . . . and this is what gave Bogado a sudden inspiration—so to speak—to start the ball rolling on a nefarious plan his mind had conceived.

That same afternoon, just after Sanfronia left the chard to fill the pots with water and then returned to her work, Bogado emerged

from a hiding place to pour poison in Octupo's private pots. That done, the big farmer headed back to his farm happier than he had felt for a long time. He didn't want to hang around to watch the old man die. His only regret was that he couldn't poison the homely one without poisoning Angela in the process, but he had other plans for Sanfronia.

The following morning, Bogado did an unusual thing. He told his wife to do the shopping in the village—something he had never allowed her to do. Melana was delighted. She was certain that her husband was changing to the better. She jumped at the opportunity and went off.

When she returned, Bogado watched her move around the house with an impatient look on his face.

"Well?" he finally said. "What keeps you so silent from the gossip you no doubt picked up?"

She was surprised: "You—really interested in listening to gossip, my husband? I thought you didn't—"

"Never mind what I didn't. What did you learn?" he snapped.

"A sad thing," she sighed. "The old farmer Octupo died at his supper table last night. But the peasants suspect that the two young wives poisoned him to own the farm for themselves."

Bogado hid his concern "You mean—they are going to arrest the women?"

"No. The coroner and the constable have already signed the death certificate, I heard, attributing the death to old age—and—" Melana paused to smile broadly, "—to the fact that the old man probably tried to keep up with his young wives' demands."

Despite himself, Bogado smiled in relief. Melana believed this a pleasant encouragement to tell more, but Bogado interrupted: "You are certain that the constable and coroner's verdict attribute the death to natural causes?"

"Yes. The grain-store owner told me—and he is the mayor of the village. Besides, Sanfronia and Angela are good women. Sanfronia, for instance—the homely one—she—"

"Enough!" said Bogado. "I have listened to enough useless gossip."

Gone back to her duties obediently, Bogado smiled and lifted a drink of tooba to his lips. He was toasting to the success of his murder, but it was far from being perfected yet. There was the final *coup-de-grace* to be delivered still. To own the beautiful Angela, there was still work to be done. Melana was to be the next victim. As he had almost killed her in beatings more than once, it wouldn't be hard to do. In fact, Melana's death

would kill two birds with one proverbial stone—the other victim, the ugly woman. He had it all planned. This perfect murder couldn't fail.

Bogado gloated under the influence of the tooba wine that hardly affected his glands, except to make him forget how boring it was to watch his wife slaving on the field every day. As he lay there drinking, he wondered what it was that first made him fall in love with the beautiful mestiza.

Perhaps, how much stronger she was than Melana—the way she carted those mangos by the basketful with apparent ease. At any rate, he was big and strong himself and would have little trouble persuading Angela to marry him in the near future. It was all a chance worth taking, and even if she would not have him, think of the deep satisfaction in ridding of Octupo, his own wife, and finally the ugly woman—.

He startled his wife by asking: "You sure Sanfronia comes here to borrow sugar every night?"

"Yes. Every night."

"Will she be here tonight?"

Melana smiled: "It depends on whether she loves sugar more than her deceased husband. In the three months we live here, she has not failed a single evening."

"What time will she be here tonight?"

"About nine—usually an hour after you go to bed."

"I'm not going to bed tonight. Not that early, anyway. You're the lucky one that's always tired enough to go to sleep," he smiled crookedly.

Melana was sewing clothes, squatting in a corner of the room. She sighed and thought it was a good thing Bogado didn't work as hard as she did. He would be more irritable and cruel. Now, thanks to Bogado's sudden change to the good, life here in Natividad was an almost happy one—even with her drudging.

It neared the hour of nine. The village of Natividad had long grown silent. Most of its population had gone to sleep, but Bogado's candles went on burning as his wife stitched and sewed in dutiful silence.

The big farmer frowned. A look at his big pocket-watch said a quarter-of-ten. He paced the floor, stopping now and then to peer out the window. There was only darkness. Melana wondered what was in her husband's mind but, seeing the annoyed look on his face, desisted asking.

It was many minutes after ten when Bogado saw the ugly Sanfronia approaching his house. Even in the darkness he could make out

her awkward gait. Now he had to work quickly. It wouldn't do to have her enter into the house.

There was a bread-fruit knife on the small table where the candles burned. Bogado picked the weapon up casually. Melana hardly noticed this in her sewing. Suddenly, he pounced on his wife and stabbed her in the heart unmercifully. There was no startled look on her face. Bogado hadn't given her a chance to know what it was all about . . .

Satisfied that his wife's heart had ceased beating, Bogado ran into the small pantry. From a bamboo shelf he extracted a heavy bag of sugar. With this he ran out of the house and confronted Sanfronia almost as she neared the door.

"Take this sugar with my best wishes," Bogado smiled, handing it to her. "Eat and enjoy. It is a pleasure to have such a good neighbor."

Sanfronia's eyes misted with gratefulness. Her large mouth twitched with greediness at the size of her prize. Never had she seen this much sugar all at once. Without a word she turned around and fled into the night.

Bogado watched her with a frown: "She could have at least said thank you," he grumbled.

He shrugged and went back into the house. Five minutes later he emerged staggering. He bore a painful expression on his countenance. His hand clutched tightly at a wound on his shoulder. The blood dripped to the ground and he cursed aloud for having stabbed himself so hard. But—it had had to be done. . . . .

An elderly, gentle-faced constable opened the door of his small jail-house and caught the bloody Bogado in his arms. Without a word he helped the wounded man to a small cot, where with the aid of the bandana he wore around his neck he proceeded to staunch the flow of blood. Fixing it into a temporary tourniquet, he looked inquiringly at the much weakened Bogado.

"M-my house—" he gasped. "Someone—that woman—came in. My wife—murdered—"

The constable's eyes opened wide. "You say someone came in and murdered your wife. You know who it was?"

"That ugly woman! I can't believe it. She—"

The sickish shade on Bogado's usually brown face, worried the constable. "All right. Don't do anymore talking. Just lie there and rest, companero. I'll be back."

Constable Ingatzio Luro had seen Bogado come to buy things in the village on a few occasions. Ingatzio

learned from the villagers that he was the very uncommunicative, unmingling type. Of course, it was a man's privilege to be that way if he wished. All the constable cared was that a man be peaceful and law-abiding. That's all that mattered.

The elderly constable knew where the Bogado farm was located. It had been on sale and neglected for a long time. Even in the dark, now, the constable could see the hard work that had gone into making the once weed-ridden field into a neat and productive one. After all, that's what farmer's wives were for.

Stopping near the door of the house Ingatzio, with the aid of a small flash-light, saw the blood on the hard ground. He stepped into the house carefully. A small table lay upset on the bamboo-floor. There were two doused candles and a trail of something that led from the small pantry. He bent down and tasted the tiny crystals. Sugar.

Nearby, was Melana—a bloody, lifeless heap. Ingatzio winced and made a search for the murder weapon. He didn't find any.

He said half-aloud: "Bogado mentioned an ugly woman. Sanfronia?" He muttered under his breath. The whole town knew of Sanfronia's sweet tooth. But he didn't think her capable of murder for it. Still. . . . .

There was a stairway leading upstairs. Ingatzio went up. Nothing unusual here—just the bed-room where Bogado and his wife slept. The only way the constable could see what had happened was that Bogado had retired early, while his wife sat downstairs sewing some things. Then the intruder. There must have been an argument. Perhaps Mrs. Bogado had gotten sick and tired of the ugly woman chiseling sugar from her. Sanfronia stabbed her and ran into the pantry. Bogado, hearing the noise downstairs caught Sanfronia in the act of stealing the sugar. Then she stabbed him on the shoulder and ran out with the sugar, spilling some of it along the way.

When constable Ingatzio returned to the jail, he said to Bogado: "Feeling stronger again, compañero?"

"My wife?"

"I'm sorry," Ingatzio bowed his head respectfully.

"I cannot believe it. Melana dead!"

"If you wish to—you can tell me what happened."

"I tried to stop her, but I didn't see the knife in her hands."

"From the beginning, please."

"I—I went to bed at eight. My wife was sewing in the room downstairs. Then I heard some yelling

and woke up. When I went downstairs I saw this ugly woman in the pantry trying to steal something. . . . . ."

The kindly-faced constable nodded, encouragingly—allowing the weak Filipino to take his time in the telling. So far, everything tallied with what he had deduced at the murder scene. It was going to prove unfortunate for the homely, greedy widow.

"I told her—" Bogado resumed — "to put back the sugar bag. She shook her head violently and said: "Try and stop me, sir! I have to have this sugar!"

"It was when I went to snatch the bag from her that she produced the knife and stabbed me. She ran out and I attempted to make chase. I almost tripped over something big. It was my wife—bleeding terribly from the chest. I screamed and then almost fell into a faint. But I did not want to faint. I came to the jail, instead."

The constable nodded politely—but there was a look of amazement on his face which Bogado mistook as amazement at the cruel, fiendish action of Sanfronia.

"This cot has no mattress," said the constable, gently. "Please let me help you to one inside the cell. You will lie there and I will go for the doctor to attend to your wound."

Bogado nodded. The constable took from keys from his desk and opened a cell. Then he carried Bogado gently inside on a mattressed cot.

"Thank you, constable," said the big farmer gratefully.

"You're entirely welcome," said the constable, going out and locking the cell firmly.

The big farmer sat up, looking confused: "You are locking me in? Why?"

The elderly man said almost sorrowfully: "For the murder of your wife, companero—naturally! Too bad."

Bogado was speechless.

The constable said: "Do you want to confess?"

Still, the big farmer couldn't speak. He was trying to think where he erred and couldn't. It seemed inconceivable. Hadn't he taken many great pains to make the murder look perfect? Perhaps, the constable was joking—accusing him without a reason—which, no doubt, was a common trick employed by the best of law men.

The constable went on, gently: "You seemed to have lost your voice, companero. But you are fortunate. It will come back to you. But to an ugly woman named Sanfronia —never. You see—during the Japanese occupation the enemy tortured

her and cut out her tongue. Therefore, Sanfronia could not possibly have spoken the words you attribute to her at the murder scene—"Try and stop me, sir! I have to have this sugar!" "

Now Bogado was really speechless—but in the next moment made some infuriated animal noises and sprang up from his cot! His eyes were aflame with a frustrated, maniacal stare. He grabbed the bars of the jail and shook them in vain. The constable had been most wise in locking up the murderous, big man.

Constable Ingatzio shook his head, looking very puzzled. "I am surprised, sir—" he began, "that you did not know than Sanfronia was a mute woman. You have been living in Natividad, here, for the last three months, and she has been a neighbor of yours. How come?"

Bogado gasped and slid down on the floor on his knees, his head bowed. He tried to say words and still couldn't. Dazed almost beyond all comprehension, he seemed to hear the voice of his wife again, saying: "To get along decently, a farmer, especially, should acquaint himself with what's going on in his community at all times. . . . . ."

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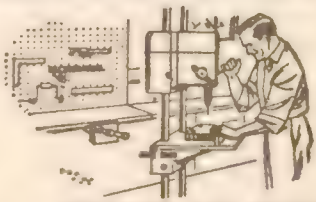

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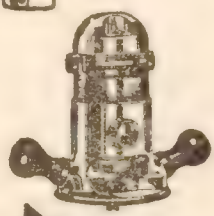

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THE PEOPLE VS. THE MOBS

by T. C. McCLARY

In the whole history of American crime, no investigation has compared in magnitude, results and danger with the Dewey Special Rackets Investigation of 1935.

During the course of it, Dewey himself was slated for murder. Corruption and influence reached so deep that the State's star witness, under police guard at Coney Island's Half Moon Hotel, was hurled from a window to his death. Trusted members of law enforcement agencies were actually tipping off the mobs. Literally hundreds of potential witnesses and tipoffs were silenced or driven into hiding by threats from Murder Inc. It is probable that scores of stoolpigeons, informers and undercover investigators were actually rubbed out.

Since Prohibition, the underworld had run hogwild, with machine guns, grenades, stabbings, drownings, droppings and screeching run-downs its daily weapons. The ganglords had grown arrogant. They thought, with considerable good reason, that they owned the Law.

This was the first great test of the People vs. the Mobs. It was vital to the mobs to break up the investigation at any cost. They were alert, distrustful, and triggered to torture or kill on the slightest suspicion.

Along this tightrope of mayhem and murder stepped "Danny" Danforth, key undercover operator in the investigation of Lucky Luciano, keenest and most merciless of all the ganglords.

Luciano's interests reached far and deep. But Dewey was targetting his attack on the Mafia lord's control of New York vice and prostitution.

Luciano's lieutenants in this racket were Tommy "the Bull" Pennochio, a fearsome giant with the mangling bloodlust of a monster; Little Davie Betillo, a psychopathic killer who looked like a choirboy; affable but ruthless Jimmy Fredericks; smoldering Ralph Liguori; sharp-eyed, fast actioned, Danny Brooks, Beneath this level were a conglomerate variety of hoodlums, thugs, psychopaths, many of whom were henchmen of Murder Inc. as well.

The hangout for this job was Jamison's bar on West 57th Street. This was the death trap that Danny Danforth picked as the hub for his undercover operations. Travelling as Danny O'Brien, a Boston vice operator on the lam, he took the calculated risk of being beaten, tortured or murdered as a means of "getting in."

He took the further risk of travelling without a gun.

To top that, he was forbidden any type of communication with his office. He had no cover if an emergency arose. Once a week, some member of the Prosecutor's staff would meet him on a ferry, a subway station, some other public place. If he failed to keep the appointment on six consecutive days, then the D.A. would look around for him—or his remains.

These meetings were probably the severest test of his cold nerve. These were the times he had reports and addresses on him. He might be shadowed, and the man he met in turn, establishing beyond doubt his connection with the D.A.'s office.

The popular TV program, *"The D.A.'s Man,"* based on James D. Horan's book on Danforth's undercover work, highlights the tremendous importance of secret undercover contacts with the office, and at other times, the operator's complete divorcement. But not even TV can overdramatize the undercover man's sense of lonely peril. He is one of the few minions of the law who cannot hope for help from others in his own establishment. Few of his cohorts know him or what he is up to, in the first place. Fewer would go to his aid unless so ordered from fear that what appeared an emergency might be some part of a carefully worked out plan.

This, then, was Dan's background and chances of survival when he began hanging around Jamison's, and encouraged notice which would supply his "in"—or "end."

He played a cool game. He had to. He gave no notice to the mob's business or its members. He simply acted slightly "hot" and anxious to mind his own business.

He aroused curiosity enough. He also aroused suspicion. He caught the first chill edge of it the first night he came in alone. Cold-eyed Danny Brooks was standing by the coat rack as if waiting for him. Danforth was a regular customer by then. Danny Brooks handed him a coat hanger with casual, bar room courtesy, but there was nothing casual or courteous about his eyes. He watched Danforth steadily as he put his coat onto the hanger. Then Danny Brooks took it back to hang it, hefting it for the weight of a gun while doing so.

A couple of big shouldered regulars then got friendly—one to each side of Danforth. They invited him for a drink. He had the cold sensation that something had slipped somewhere, and this might be the last drink he'd ever have. Professionally, they brushed and sidled against him as they drank, and he realized with relief that they were simply frisking him.

There was still, though, the back room, and all those intent, hostile eyes, and the long, long night ahead. He went to play pinball by himself, hoping that his hand was steady and that the chill in his neck did not climb to pale his face.

He needed his healthy color. Almost immediately, a tough looking Irish gunman breasted him with outright suspicion. This character demanded to know why "Danny O'Brien" had come to pick Jamison's as a hangout.

Danforth said glibly that the doorman at the Flamingo—a known "steerer" in the vice racket—had recommended it. The Irishman turned Danforth icecold with his next remark. He said the Flamingo had been closed two months. And Danforth didn't know if that were so, or not.

The bar had gone utterly silent. Hard, reptilian eyes centered on Danforth as men listened for his answer. He took his chance. He called the gunman to put up money that the Flamingo was closed.

The killer laughed suddenly and whacked him on the shoulder and bought a drink. The nightclub had never closed. It had just been a gag to test him.

Danforth's nerves had sure been tested! For those moments, he had felt like a man with his head rest-

ing on the block of a guillotine.

His next play to get in with the mob put him on the spot even worse. He picked up three slinky hipped chippies to play the part of being some of his Boston dolls, and brought them into Jamison's. He thought it would build up his character as a vice operator. But every regular in the place, and the bartender, froze solid on him.

He had committed the heresy of bringing red light girls into the mob's collection headquarters. If the cops spotted the girls and picked them up, they could shut down the bar, and they'd probably *"confiscate"* any money they found on hand. As the "take" from each of Luciano's districts was brought in here every night, it could mean a sizeable loss.

Although Danforth teetered on the abyss of a good mauling and grilling that night, it served him well when he managed to renew friendship with Jimmy Fredericks and the others. Jimmy thought he'd been dumb, but accepted the fact that in Boston, "the boys" didn't have to worry so much about the cops. And in accepting that, he finally accepted Dan as a "legitimate" red light operator.

Weeks had gone by now. Danforth was growing tense and nervous under the strain of playacting, with minute-by-minute chance of exposure. And the chance was great. He was stretching borrowed time. He might be recognized by some hood who'd known him in the past. Some real operator from Boston might drift in, and call his bluff. He might make a slip himself. Most of all, there was the constant, subsurface suspicion of anyone new, and the unpredictable flareups of heavily drinking mobsters if they caught the smell of a stool.

But Danforth had not yet accomplished his mission, which was to tie Luciano in as head of this mob, and owner of the nightly collections. Finally, his chance came, but this was going to be a far tougher test than anything so far. Luciano was noted as sharp to the point of clairvoyance. It was said that he could actually smell a phoney or a lie.

Danforth was in the soup though, and he had to follow through. His gag had been that he wanted to operate in New York. For that, he would have to make his deal with Luciano. Now, just when his nerves were beginning to crackle, his "pal" Fredericks told him he'd have the chance at the birthday party they were throwing for the big boss.

Now that Fredericks had finally decided to introduce him to the

boss, the mob was really screening Danforth. One who didn't like any part of his smell was little Davie Betillo, the slim, choir-faced killer with his limp disdainful handshake. Betillo's feelings were clear, Danforth had the sudden hunch that he was being put on the spot. And it was a spot he couldn't move off of!

He felt certain, that if he wasn't ganged before, he'd be put on a grill at Luciano's party—the kind of a grill meant to get the truth out of a man.

Danforth himself has never boasted that his nerve would have held out during a grilling by the rapier-minded Luciano, aided, of course, by his assorted sadistic and brutal thugs. Dan had come a long way on nerve and make-believe. He had gathered all the necessary basic evidence needed, except the clinching fact that Luciano was the actual overlord of New York's vice. But nobody knew better than he himself how great a toll the tension had taken. He was frayed and shaky.

He was saved from his peril by Dewey's swift action before Luciano's birthday. At 9 p.m. promptly, on the night of February 1st, 1936, Dewey marshalled a simultaneous raid on forty houses of prostitution. Hundreds of harlots, madames, pimps, molls and gangsters were run into the Special Prosecutors offices in New York's staid Woolworth building. From them was gathered sufficient evidence to drive Luciano flying for Hot Springs, and to hold his lieutenants until trial.

Danny Danforth's job was over. He could give his saw-edged nerves a rest. He thought.

He thought again when he heard his next assignment. He was to "get the goods" on Jimmy Hines—most powerful Tammany chieftain in New York—and his protection of Dutch Schultz and other "uppers" in the underworld.

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MONEY BACK GUARANTEE!

Three Helpful Teachers

by JOHN JAKES

The two men crouched in the cave: Roger wearing mud-spotted whites and a solar topee, the teak-colored Singhalese clad in just a turban and clout. Between them on an oiled cloth lay a wicked high-powered rifle with telescopic sight. Outside the dank rain forest of Ceylon was steaming in the aftermath of a sudden shower which had passed on.

"Very important for you to shoot straight," Roger was saying earnestly. "I will show myself at Nettles' plantation. Nettles, like you, is friendly to my people. He will tell me which of the three teachers is the woman I seek. A bad woman. An agent, causing much trouble to my people. Nettles will take us into the garden for tea. I'll pull my handkerchief and arrange to wave it next to the proper woman. You shoot the woman. Shoot to kill. Big reward for you, Hu Panga. My people recommended you because you shoot so well."

"I watch, boss," the taciturn native replied. "When you signal, I blow brains out, kaboom."

"Goood for you, Hu Panga," Roger said, rising. He hoped it would all come out as simply as he had outlined it to the Singhalese who was receiving a thousand dollars for his aid. Roger bent to leave

the cave. His attention was arrested by a strange whitish glow coming from a natural niche in the cave wall. "What in the devil makes that funny little glow?" he asked, peering closer. "I just now noticed it."

Hu Panga stuck his hand into the niche and pulled it out again. In his dark palm Roger was surprised to see several small, but dead, insects. "The *demi* fly," Hu Panga informed him. He ground his palms together. When he opened them both palms glowed with an even brighter radiance. "Magic lights in wings glow like this. Sometimes shine like lanterns among the trees."

"Imagine that," Roger replied. "I know they have such in New Zealand, but Ceylon . . . oh, well." He adjusted his topee. "Check the rifle, Hu Panga, then follow me down to Nettles'."

Stepping briskly along the muddy trail which led down through the green and steaming rain forest, Roger lit a native-made cheroot and smoked to calm his nerves. The powerful cigar made him cough hackingly. Everything was extreme in Ceylon. Bigger trees. Hotter temperatures. Assassination of an agent from the other side of the fence instead of some more humane, less lethal method of damaging their effectiveness. Still, not all the ones on the opposite side were like Anna-Rose Gazzik. Roger didn't know what she looked like. Supposedly rather unattractive but remarkably oversexed, according to report. Fatally attractive to some types of men.

Not to me, thought Roger. He knew the lady's record. Roger was experienced but some of Anna-Rose Gazzik's practices made even his hardened flesh crawl.

Which one of the three seemingly innocent teachers in the slightly pollyanna-ish, Self-Help Cultural Mission would be Gazzik? Could it be (Roger consulted a slip of paper) Miss Libby Oaketrees, instructor in sculpture? Or Miss Heloise Mercer, teacher of the drama? Or was it Miss Rowena Fitch, coordinator of rhythmic activities? He'd soon know. A long, tough trail would soon come to an end. Roger's nerves tightened all at once.

He emerged from the edge of the rain forest and saw before him the frame house which was the center of the rubber and citronella-grass plantation of Clive Nettles, Bart. The carefully-maintained formal garden stood deserted. From somewhere came the sound of a piano, gourds rattling and native voices singing *America* in Singhalese. Glad that the Self-Help Cultural Mission was temporarily occupied, Roger cir-

cled the house and poked his head through an open window. The room inside appeared to be a study. A man in whites, tall, in his fifties, with a freckled bald head, was working at a ledger. Roger hissed.

"Hullo! Who's there?" The man started and yanked a Luger into sight with miraculous speed.

"Nettles? Don't be alarmed. I'm Roger."

Roger climbed over the window sill as Nettles breathed a sigh of relief. Nettles took out his handkerchief and mopped his forehead. He and the British planter shook hands. Nettles had laid the Luger on the blotter next to his record book. Roger said: "I flew down from Bombay as soon as we got your wife. I was the nearest man. Believe me, we're eternally grateful to you for spotting the Gazzik number. It was a real piece of detective work. It's lucky you used to be with M15, so you know her reputation and how much she meant to us. By the way, how did you find out about her?"

"Overheard some conversation," Nettles muttered, as though embarrassed. "Doesn't matter, really. Bit of a rum show, seems to me." He opened a cupboard. "Whisky-soda?"

"No, thanks," Roger said. "I'd like to get on with it. It should be time for tea soon. Can we go into the garden? We'll get a clearer shot at her that way. Which one is she, Nettles? You haven't told me. Miss Oaketrees, Miss Fitch, or Miss Mercer?"

"Miss Heloise Mercer," Nettles answered with a peculiar expression whose significance Roger did not immediately grasp. "Appears she chose this cultural mission as a cover for her activities in Ceylon. Remarkable woman," he murmured. "Papers in order, everything tophole. Remarkable." Nettles shook his head sadly. "Would you care to meet her, Roger?"

"Time for that when we join the others at tea," Roger said. "It'll arouse less suspicion. Do you think we could have tea a little earlier than usual today?"

Nettles picked up the Luger and pointed it directly at Roger's stomach. "I'm afraid there isn't going to be any tea today, old chap. Nor ever again, as far as you're concerned."

With a gasp of disbelief Roger started forward. "Nettles, have you lost your mind?"

"No, I've recovered it," Nettles said with an odd smile. "A week ago I was ready to betray Anna-Rose without even knowing her firsthand. There's been some horrible mistake all these years, Roger. She's no butcher, no revolutionary. She's

a fine, passionate woman. Warm, alluring, motherly." Nettles colored, stepping to the study door.

"My God," said Roger in dismay. "She's flimflammed you just like a hundred others."

"Shut your mouth," said Nettles. His fingers grew white where he held the Luger. Nettles stuck his head into the corridor and called, "Heloise? Heloise, darling. Would you step in here a moment? There's someone I'd like to have you meet."

The clack of flat-heeled sensible shoes sounded in the corridor. Miss Heloise Mercer alias Anna-Rose Gazzik entered. She stood a full five inches taller than Nettles, who was not a short man. Although she displayed the contours of a wildly voluptuous bosom beneath her print dress the muscles on her upper arms looked formidable as a man's. Her jaw was square. With her hair combed in a bun she resembled a wrestler in a wig. But Roger did find some fascination in her faintly slanted amber eyes.

"Dear Anna," Nettles said to the smiling woman, "may I present Mr. Roger? This is the one I told you about when I confessed to you and revealed my treachery. The assassin."

Anna-Rose Gazzik threw Roger a long and penetrating glance which aroused chills on his sweat-dampened spine. Roger said easily, "It's an honor to make your acquaintance, Miss Gazzik. You're everything I've heard you were. I can easily understand your power over men a man might lose all his reason when you're around."

The barb bypassed Clive Nettles completely. Anna-Rose Gazzik smiled, displaying somewhat horselike teeth. She lifted one hand to pat her hairdo, as though even a female of such bloody reputation could not set aside the womanly instinct to see if everything was in place when attention was paid to her. Roger drew a breath.

"I suppose you figure you've got me now. Maybe you have. On the other hand, Miss Gazzik, it's only fair to warn you that my people know your whereabouts. Somebody'll be along to kill you when I'm gone. They won't fail, either."

Anna-Rose Gazzik stepped forward and hit Roger in the mouth, uttering an obscenity.

"Never heard a woman say that before," Roger said, massaging his mouth. "Lovely bedmate you picked for yourself, Nettles. Gentle as a snake,"

"I am going to enjoy devising your method of execution," said Anna-Rose.

"Meantime," spoke Nettles, "we'll lock this beggar in the dog pens."

"At least be a sport about it and let me have the drink you offered," Roger said, moving toward the cabinet. He picked up the decanter. "My nerves are shot."

With that, he hurled the decanter straight at Nettles' chest. Nettles discharged the Luger but the bullet went wild. By that time Roger had dived through the open window. He landed with a jolt and went running across the garden toward the trail to the rain forest. Nettles fired the Luger after him. Bullets buzzed close. Anna-Rose Gazzik howled a protracted string of unique oaths and obscenities. But Roger made it safely to the fringes of the foliage. He pelted up the trail without stopping. Sure enough, by the time he had reached the cave, Hu Panga slipped up quietly beside him from another direction.

"I saw boss run from the house," the Singhalese said. "There is danger behind?"

"Plenty," said Roger. He listened. Dogs were barking ferociously.

He pushed Hu Panga into the cave. The two men quickly contrived a makeshift screen of brush. They lay hardly daring to breathe while Nettles' natives beat through the forest. Dogs barked and snapped everywhere. Finally, when the thick steamy night began to fall, the barking retreated. Roger had been mulling a plan. Before he could speak anything of it, Hu Panga suggested they avoid danger and journey immediately coastward.

Roger shook his head, looking around the cave. "No, I have to finish that Gazzik woman. I have to do it tonight. And it means going right back into Nettles' hands, but I think I know a way to pull it off. They won't suspect, not in the darkness. I hope," he added.

. . . Half an hour later, in the semi-darkness, Roger walked down the trail and emerged at the edge of the forest. He saw dim figures stirring in the garden and heard the fragile clatter of a tea service. Rough hands seized his arms. Two of Nettles' boys had leaped from concealment and gripped his arms. Roger did not fight. He had expected something of the sort. He allowed himself to be hustled into the garden where Nettles was serving iced punch to the two honest teachers and the ersatz Miss Mercer.

Misses Oaketrees and Fitch remained blowsy shadows in the background, but Nettles and Anna-Rose rushed forward. The latter slapped Roger in the face again. Roger controlled his temper as best he could.

"Please don't do that," he said. "I've seen the error of my ways."

"What the devil do you mean?" Nettles hissed.

"Just that I'm not accustomed to wandering around all night in tropical forests. I dodged your boys, but I started to go buggy when I thought about sleeping out there all night." Roger adopted a hangdog look. "I came to surrender. I'm a coward."

Nettles snorted. "Didn't I tell you, Miss Mercer? That's exactly why I called off my boys. I knew you weren't made of the right stuff, Roger. I knew that as soon as the sun dropped down you'd get the crawls from all the ruddy insects and things a-stirring."

Roger shook his head with a puzzled sigh. "I envy you, Nettles. I had plenty of time to think out there. I envy you the charm, or whatever it is, that enables you to attract a woman like Miss Gazzik. A really strong, courageous woman. There aren't many like that left in the world." As if on impulse, Roger took his hand from his pocket and seized Miss Gazzik's own hand, bending stiffly and pressing his lips to it.

"He's not so bad for a paid assassin," Anna-Rose Gazzik said, raising her hand instinctively and patting her hair. Roger let out a sigh of relief. Nettles jerked him forward and pressed a cup of iced punch into his hand, saying in a low tone:

"Have a bit of punch as though you're a guest. Don't alarm the teachers."

"Miss Mercer," piped Miss Oaketrees, "why ever is your hair glowing so strangely?"

The question was answered by the explosion of a high-powered rifle out in the rain forest. Miss Anna-Rose Gazzik cried out in pain, clutched her head and reeled against the tea cart.

Roger leaped to control Nettles. The inflamed Britisher had dragged the Luger from his pocket. Roger knocked him down. Nettles kept thrashing. Before he managed to get Nettles quiet, Roger discovered that he had throttled him to death. Miss Gazzik was also dead, her head blown in.

Roger rose, wiped his mouth and used the Luger to menace a group of Nettles' boys gathered near the garden. Roger didn't like his business right then. He didn't like murdering a woman no matter how many of his people she'd murdered in the past.

Hu Panga came trotting down the trail carrying his rifle. He grinned to see his handiwork. "Good trick, boss. Crushed *demi* in the pocket. Shake hands. Lady pat hair just like you said. Head glow, good target. Must have been good compliment."

"Not so good," said Roger glumly. "It's just that she was as much woman as spy. There are some habits of the female that don't change, ever."

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